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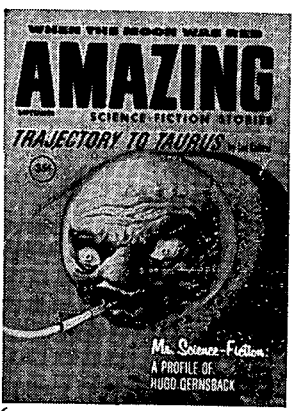


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**Science Fiction Stories**

**SEPTEMBER 1960**

**Volume 9 Number 9**

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.



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**Editorial Director**

NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

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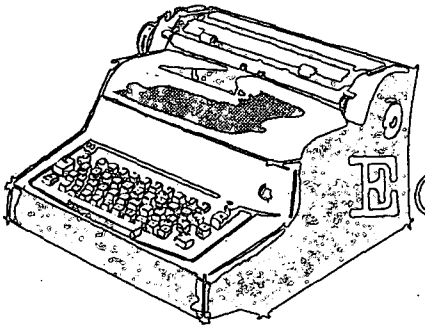

# Editorial

NOT long ago I took a business trip to a part of the world that has long fascinated me—Greece. Athens itself I did not find so interesting. Athens is by and large a cluttered, noisy place, with little of import beyond two excellent museums and, of course, the Acropolis. At the risk of being considered an arrant Philistine, I will also admit to the fact that I didn't think too much of the Acropolis, either. Once upon a time it must have been a stimulating place. But the tourist who climbs its rocky slopes today to admire the remains of the Parthenon and the Temple of Diana has to thread his way through busloads of other tourists, small children weilding noisemakers, boys and girls necking, and itinerant vendors hawking photographs, orange soda and ice cream sticks. Socrates would never know the place.

What I *did* like about Greece were the islands of the Aegean and the Mediterranean. And—to get to the subject of this essay—the isle of Crete. Ever since I was a wee tot, the legend of the Minotaur intrigued me. And then, thanks to jet planes and the power of a travelers' check, there I was standing on the ruins of the Palace of Minos at Knossos—site of a civilization at least 4,000 years old. And in the distance were Mts. Ida and Dicte, where the god Zeus is reputed to have been born and to have died. The men who excavated Knossos had a great idea, they thought. Most archeological ruins are just that—ruins. The layman has a hard time imagining what the layout looked like in its original state. Guides point to the King's Quarters and the Queen's Bath, and the Great Hall and the Treasury, but to the uninitiated it is all a jumble of partially-broken stones. So at Knossos, it was decided to *recreate*—in such a way

*(Continued on page 128)*



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ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU

# THE SHADOWSMITH



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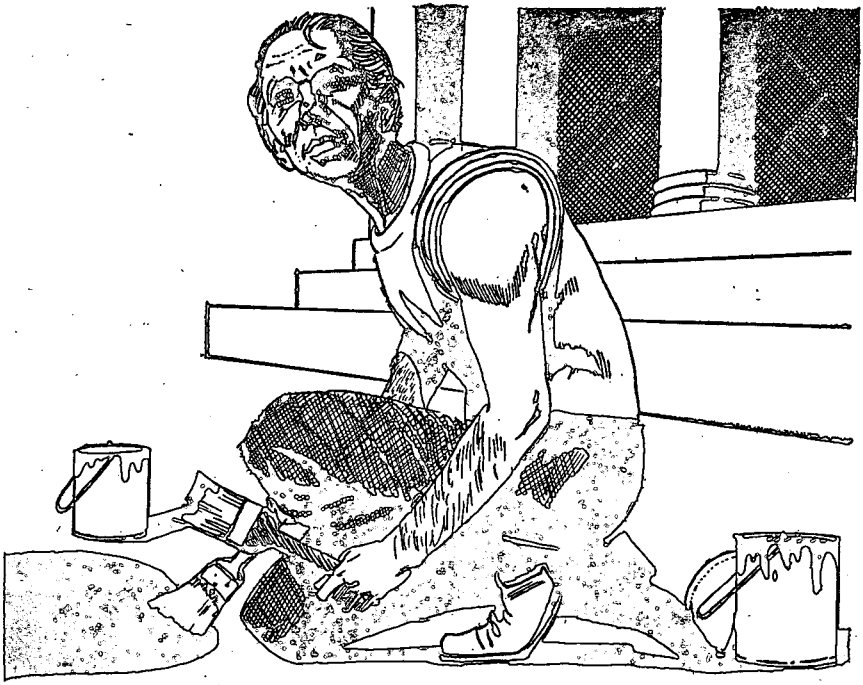

*The Shadowsmith can create or destroy . . .*
*His was an art as old as time . . . and so*
*was Karabel's hate and fear.*

By ARTHUR PORGES



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THERE are very few shadowsmiths nowadays. They have never been numerous, for shadowsmithing is more of an art than a trade; the mere technique, although incredibly exacting, means little without a broad foundation of creative talent. No engineer is required to know as much about light, the texture of materials, and the vexations of projective geometry. Obviously, to mention but a single detail, a shadow thrown brashly upon soiled grey concrete by a July sun at noon, is related only distantly to one flickering at midnight upon candle-lit, waxed hardwood. Only the best of the shadowsmiths understand the subtle colors of shadows: the intense blue-black of full vigor, shading into fuzzy slate as the light wanes; and most difficult of all, perhaps, the gauzy silver moonshadow when high-riding clouds and leaves shatter the image to dancing flecks.

Now, paradoxically enough, a shadowsmithy is a studio of light. There are sunlamps and candles; fireplaces and fluorescent tubes; spotlights that probe with bold white fingers; and multiple-source reflectors that dabble obscurely in penumbras.

Yes, there are few of these strange artists left, but Karabel was a man of great persistence, eaten up by hate; moreover he was ready to spend his life savings for revenge, and so he finally met Redi, last of the master shadowsmiths.

His success was due to a fortunate coincidence. If Luis Alvarez, late of Mexico, and now—quite illegally—in Los Angeles had not been in the habit of sunning himself, and little Maria, in the park across from Karabel's apartment, the matter would have been handled otherwise. For it was Luis who first spoke to Karabel about shadows and the evil men able to manipulate them.

"A shadow can be very bad, Senor," he said gravely, stroking Maria's black hair. "Just before the little one here was almost killed by the fever, Tia Elena saw a great misshapen shadow, like a strange bird, reach for the child with its talons. If Elena had not snatched Maria away in time . . ." His black eyes glittered, and he touched the knife-hilt under his faded shirt. "If I knew who tried to hurt my little Maria . . ."

He went on to speak of the shadowsmith who once passed through the village, summoned, no doubt, by the patron, an enemy of the Church. Karabel listened with interest. He had traveled widely, and was wise enough to accept the occult. In Haiti his last doubts had died. Magic could kill, and was singularly police-proof. He would find



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a shadowsmith to implement a very simple plan. One that would dispose of Marsden for good.

It had been a long, frustrating search, but now it was over.

A small man was Redi, fragile and wrinkled, like crumpled tissue. A wispy fellow, grey and wise as a badger, who had oily marbles for eyes, and a voice that hummed thinly like a great swarm of gnats.

"Ordinarily my price would be far beyond your means," he told Karabel. "But I'm retiring, and your conception pleases me. Tomorrow I'll be gone; the profession is dead. I shall wander the earth, just observing new and interesting shadows. There should be wonderful ones on blue snow under the midnight sun. But this one last job for the sheer love of it, and as a farewell. You are lucky."

Karabel flicked one thick hand impatiently, so strong was his hate. "A profile," he said in a peremptory tone. "Just a sharp, black profile. That's all I need. There's no necessity for fancy techniques." He thrust a photograph at Redi. "Like this. And here are others, from many angles."

The shadowsmith gave them a casual glance. "You don't understand," he rebuked Karabel. "One doesn't ask a sculptor to carve a statue true to its subject from only one point of view. An artist requires complete freedom."

"A single good projection will do the job, so why—?"

"Your new shadow," Redi broke in, his marble eyes unblinking, "must be unexceptionable from every direction. Further, it must be adjusted to many backgrounds, and able to shift smoothly from one configuration to another. A shadow, also, that bends properly over right angles; for example, when cast upon a curbstone. One that matches its length to the altitude of the sun. There is much work, but I am retiring tomorrow, and cannot countenance slipshod inattention to even the smallest details.

Karabel's head flew back; he opened his mouth for an angry protest. Then, remembering his need and the long search, he snapped ungraciously: "Very well. You artists are all alike. It takes a business man to use common sense. Let's get going right away. I'll be using the shadow tomorrow."

"As you like. We'll do the profile first, then."

He led his sullen client to a small dais about four feet from a white wall, and after switching on a powerful spotlight, tugged him gently into position. He made a number of minor adjustments in Karabel's stance,



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had him remove a floppy jacket, and buzzed with satisfaction.

"Good. Stand very still. No, don't turn your head."

Black and clear, Karabel's shadow rested motionless upon the creamy plaster.

"Ah, excellent. A strong shadow, indeed; it has much character. See how boldly the rascal poses!" He took the photographs and studied them, glancing at the wall occasionally.

Karabel tried hard to watch from the corner of one eye, but it was difficult. Nevertheless what little he managed to see fascinated him, and his pique was soon forgotten. Redi began by using a heavy black pigment to extend certain parts of the shadow. Swiftly, with a deft series of strokes, he changed Karabel's button of a nose into a huge, fleshy hook; his sleek hair became a miniature haystack. A skillfully brushed border at suitable points enlarged the whole head and strengthened the receding chin.

Redi chirped his approval, put the tube of pigment aside, and took another. Karabel gave a little gasp, as with this new, neutral shade, the shadowsmith proceeded to erase portions of the silhouette. The thin neck grew heavy; the slender waist became a paunch; the narrow hips acquired padding. Certainly, Redi was a craftsman. Apparently each finger had pores that acted like tiny suction cups, for Karabel could see him tugging edges of shadow into place by an odd, stroking—almost coaxing—manipulation, buzzing the while in his somnolent voice. Finally he gave a gusty sigh.

"There," he said, with a faint, crinkly smile. "Considering my mood, it's by no means a bad job so far. Don't move," he added irritably, as Karabel started involuntarily to turn for a glimpse. "Wait until I fix it in place." Muttering, he grabbed the pigment tubes and retouched some hazy borders caused by his client's movement. Then, as Karabel rolled his eyes sideways to the limits of their orbits, Redi produced a handful of silvery adhesive strips and began to fasten the shadow's perimeter firmly to the wall.

When all the stickers were in place, he cautioned Karabel again, and with a brush of foamy golden hairs laid a transparent varnish over the immobilized shadow.

"Not yet," he rapped. "Stand absolutely still. A few moments until it hardens. The first struggle with these willful ones is important. When they know who's master, the rest goes more smoothly."

Karabel waited impatiently. A tiresome ordeal, but he was lucky



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to have found this studio at all. Redi touched the varnish, found it tacky, and said grudgingly: "Now—you may step down and see."

Karabel exhaled, grunted with relief, and stepped off the dais. He took a long look, nodding his gratification at the sight. There, on the wall, was the shadow of Marsden: the great, shaggy head, vulture nose, wide, flabby torso, and the elephantine thighs. The shadow rippled as he watched; little waves rolled across it, a mute protest against the unnatural restraint.

"Fine," he complimented Redi. "You know your business, all right. I'll make out a check—"

The glinting marbles filmed over, and the shadowsmith's puffy, bluish mouth tightened.

"We're not through. It doesn't go so fast. Come."

For a moment Karabel stood defiant, then with a shrug of annoyance, he followed the little man.

The rest of the afternoon was hectic. Karabel's shadow was cast on concrete, wood, grass, and water, Redi re-shaping it on each surface. He held himself rigid in light from sunlamps, candles, log fires, and mercury arcs. And for each type of background and illumination, the expert adjusted his client's shadow to a variety of positions, sometimes using paints, others pulling with his long fingers. No matter how he stood, now, Karabel threw the shadow of a gross, big-nosed man instead of his own. When he grumbled over unnecessary poses, Redi coldly ignored him, except to explain once, "These are merely 'key fixes'; the shadow must interpolate all the infinitely many intermediate positions. But yours, luckily, is a shadow of remarkable—ah—presence."

Finally, after four hours of arduous posing, Karabel was permitted to relax in a chair.

"How long will my new shadow last?" he demanded.

Redi shrugged. "Anywhere from two to five days. You are a strong-willed man, and your shadow is quite rebellious. I wouldn't count on more than three days at the most."

"Hah!" Karabel broke into a harsh laugh. "After this job is done, it can be mad at the whole world, for all I care. There's nothing it can do to me."

"True enough." The marbles glinted slyly. "One thinks of such phrases as 'a shadow of himself,' and others implying weakness, impotence. Well, let me give you a word of warning. This fellow of yours has tasted freedom of a kind completely new to it. Now when a man dies, his shadow, if sufficiently strong and aware, may become quite



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independent, associating itself with entities not of our world. During the few days needed for this one to revert after alteration, it will do anything to destroy you. Stay away from well-lit places, so that nobody, especially a friend of your enemy, will see the wrong shadow and perhaps get ideas. Once its present shape is lost, you should be safe. Until then, take care that it doesn't do you serious mischief."

"Thanks for the tip," Karabel said airily. "How much do I owe you?"

"There is no charge. It was my last commission; I do it for love of the game—and for the final outcome."

"Just as you like." He showed his relief. He had expected to pay well for vengeance, but so much the better. If Redi wanted to be a sucker, it was no skin off him. Briefly, as he left, his shadow, now squat and bulky, flickered over one wall.

As he drove away, with the main hurdle passed, Karabel reviewed the rest of his plan. Laura must die, too; that was the key. Marsden couldn't have stolen her so easily if she weren't corrupt. That was the beauty of his plan; it would take care of both, and he would be in at the kill, with nobody any the wiser. Even if Marsden suspected who was framing him, there wasn't a thing he could do about it. In fact, if it were merely a matter of putting the swine away, Marsden had a pretty vulnerable past. Larceny, confidence games, and maybe even a murder. Luckily Karabel knew more about Marsden than the other did about him. But those old crimes couldn't be made to stick. The latest would do much better.

He rehearsed the sequence of events once more. First, Marsden must be lured away in such a manner that his movements at the critical time would be unknown to impartial witnesses. He would have to depend on his own unverified testimony. Of vital importance was a witness to the murder, but, after all, it was the old lady whose consistent snooping had suggested this very scheme. Once her attendant left at about eight, the invalid sat propped up in bed by the window, watching. And there were only two places worth her scrutiny: the gay porte-cochere of the Two-Five Club, half a block down, and the few windows directly opposite hers, of which Laura's was one.

There was no doubt whatever that anything dramatic and not too fleeting which took place would be spotted instantly by the nosy old woman. But—and here was the beauty of it—she would be unable to summon help until



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well after the killer had escaped. Any loud screams or vigorous action was beyond her powers. What she *would* supply was damning testimony, all the more so because no grounds for bias existed. Yes, Karabel, reflected, with any luck at all, it should work.

Ethically, he had no qualms. His had always been a ruthless nature, and Marsden had injured him. As for Laura, he'd been generous; how could she prefer an ugly, slippery character like Marsden? It hurt. Well, tomorrow night would be the final accounting for them both.

At nine the next evening, using a disguised voice, he phoned Laura's apartment, and asked for Marsden. Sure enough he was there; that was routine for a Friday. Karabel pretended to be calling from a farm five miles out on an unimproved road. Marsden's sister, he reported breathlessly, had been critically injured in a car smash-up. Could he drive out there at once? His sister was asking for him, and might not live long. In five minutes, Marsden was on his way. Karabel knew that Laura would stay behind; she hated the sight of blood or suffering.

Standing on the sidewalk a few yards from the Two-Five Club, Karabel saw his enemy leave, and smiled crookedly. He used a few of his precious moments to verify discreetly that the old lady was at her post, then slipped up to Laura's flat by the side door, which was safely out of the invalid's field of view. He rapped gently. She'd probably think it was Marsden coming back for some reason, but in any case, Laura was not timid about opening her door.

She gave a little gasp when she saw him, clutching, foolishly enough, at her robe. A bit late for modesty with him. For a moment she seemed about to slam the door, but he shouldered his way in, smiling reassurance, and she retreated.

"I thought you weren't going to have any more to do with me, ever," she said, a faint sneer in her throaty voice. "Well, you can't stay here! I'm expecting company soon."

"Marsden won't be back for some time," he said coolly, looking her over. She really wasn't much; too plump; not very bright; but when she fixed those enormous greenish eyes at a man, and purred—there was no other word for it—you just had to grab her.

She was glaring at him.

"What do you mean? How dare you spy on me! That's just typical—"

"Take it easy." He dropped to the divan, and as if the lamp bothered his eyes, shoved it casually to a new position. Its hard



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yellow rays struck the drawn shade squarely. He stood up, flexing his thick fingers. Before she could scream, his muscular hands were on her throat. When she was limp in his grasp, he deliberately held their shadow on the blind while squeezing her soft neck pulseless. Then, still holding her limp body, he paraded up and down, always pausing to display Marsden's shadow starkly on the light cloth.

After some moments of this, he switched off the lamp, and cautiously, with the utmost care, raised a tiny corner of the shade to peer out. Ah! There was no doubt whatever. The old lady was slowly and feebly dragging herself from bed. How scrawny she was! In the dim light of the room, he glimpsed her distorted, tallowy face. Judging from her progress, the cops should show up just about when Marsden got back. They'd think he was returning to remove some evidence. But that didn't matter; Marsden's presence there that night, and the shadow on the blind, would combine to bring him to the Death House. Now to clear out. Calmly, without a glance at his victim on the floor, Karabel left.

Karabel enjoyed the trial. Marsden's terror and bewilderment were delicious. The man simply didn't know what was happening to him. Opportunity was easily proved; he'd admitted being at the scene of the crime. There was even a motive; more than Karabel had hoped for. Marsden had lost some of Laura's money in a wild stock gamble—how typical, Karabel thought.

The police had found the defendant sobbing over the body; the remorse of an unstable neurotic. As for the mysterious phone-call hoax, there was no evidence. Nobody had seen him on the back road, or could have vouched for his identity if he had. The only evidence that was clear and unequivocal was the old lady's testimony. There was no way to shake it. She proved, right in the courtroom, that she was far-sighted, with eyes like telephoto lenses. The shadow was undoubtedly, uniquely, that of a fat, large-headed, hook-nosed man. She had seen it plainly, and several times. Yes, it was a shadow familiar to her. On many previous nights she had noticed it; and the way those two carried on, putting the light out so late! Peeping Tom, indeed! She flayed the defense attorney in her barely audible, wheezy voice. When a body was badly crippled, and her only pleasure was watching the gay crowd in front of the Two-Five Club, how could she help seeing the well-lit window right



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across? She was a decent woman, and never looked at folks that weren't fully dressed. With no hesitation, she identified Marsden's silhouette from among a dozen similar ones. There could be no doubt.

The verdict was obvious.

Karabel left the courtroom at three. It was a gray, cloudy day, which pleased him, for his shadow had been misbehaving. Even Redi seemed to have underestimated its stubborn independence. To be sure, Marsden's shadow had soon faded, but Karabel's refused to make a whole-hearted return. At times it looked more like an amorphous blob than the outline of a man.

There was another annoyance. Luis Alvarez had taken to crossing himself when Karabel went by. Even though the man knew nothing, and had no evidence, it was irritating. For two cents he'd clout the greasy fellow—damned foreigner.

There he was now, sitting with Maria, hoping for some sun. Karabel thought of crossing to the other side, but decided against that. Instead, he'd have a talk with the little fool and try to win him over.

When he stopped in front of the Mexican, Alvarez seemed to shrink back in the chair. He made the sign of the cross in front of Maria.

"What the hell's that for?" Karabel snapped. "I haven't done anything to you."

"Go away," Luis said thickly. "You and that shadow of evil."

"Don't be a fool. I'm the same as always."

Alvarez was on his feet, the child on one arm. The sun moved briefly from behind a cloud, and the little man's black eyes widened. Then they turned to chips of ice. There, right on the sidewalk, Karabel's shadow had become that of a great bird. Its talons were sliding inexorably towards little Maria.

"No!" Luis cried. "Sangre de Cristo, no! Not again." Before Karabel knew what was happening, there was six inches of bright steel in his chest.

The last thing he saw, before death came, was his newly freed shadow, frolicking on the dirty concrete. THE END

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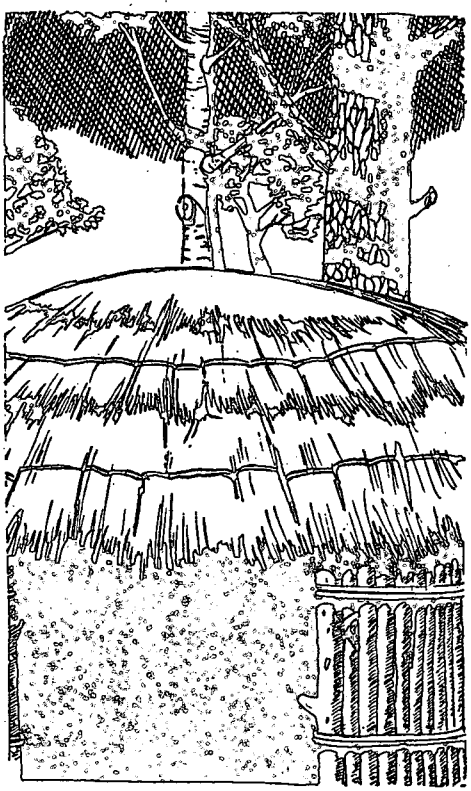
# THE MAN WHO WASN'T HOME

By LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU

*The Galaxy can be a terribly small place if you're a fugitive. It can be a terribly big place if you are a wanderer, searching for a speck you aren't even sure exists . . .*



## PROLOGUE

HARG stooped low, pushed the skin aside, and stepped through the narrow opening into his smoke-filled hut. His wife, Onga, straightened up from the clay stove, pushed the stringy black hair back from her face, and looked at him anxiously and somewhat fearfully.

"What'd the sky-man want?"

"He says Zerg must have a party."

She gazed at him blankly. "What's a party?"

"It's—eating things, mostly."

She paled, and walked towards him with small, frightened steps. "They think we don't give Zerg enough to eat? Is that why they take him?"

"No. It's . . ." He gestured helplessly. "I don't know what it



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is. Like a Star Festival, maybe, except with just us. And there are to be gifts, the sky-man said. We must make joy."

"Joy!" she moaned. She clumped to the floor, and sobs shook her frail body. She stared up at him, eyes wide with horror. "They take Zerg, and we must make joy?"

He turned away, and stood peering through a window slot. "The sky-man said he would send the things—the party things. We must make the party at the dawn, and then we must take Zerg to the River."

She did not answer. After a time he turned and bent over her and gently raised her to her feet. "At the dawn . . ." he began.

"We will make the party. I do not know how, but we will make it. We will take Zerg to the River, because we must. But we will not make joy." There was savage determination in her face, and Harg, who had no conception of beauty, thought her beautiful.

An ominous rumbling sounded in the distance, and Harg whirled and hurried to a window slot. One of the sky-men's strange things-that-crawl came rocking down the path from the River. He watched it with mouth agape as it swirled along, sending clouds of dust high into the air. It veered suddenly, and roared straight towards the hut. Harg stood his ground fearsomely, but Ongo fled moaning towards the mat where little Rirga lay sleeping. The thing-that-crawls slowed with a clanking of tracks, and came to a stop by the hut.

There was only one of the sky-men riding in it, and he jumped down and looked about, and finally walked towards the hut. He was a young man, younger than Harg, perhaps. Harg moved forward humbly.

"Harg?" the sky-man said, speaking so strangely that Harg almost failed to recognize his name.

"Yes. Harg."

The sky-man turned, picked up a box, and set it at Harg's feet. And another, and still a third. "Par-ty," he said, mouthing the word strangely. "For par-ty."

"I understand," Harg said. "We will make the party."

The sky-man nodded, vaulted aboard his thing-that-crawls, and thundered away towards the River. Dust whirled about Harg, choking him, but he stood his ground until the sky-man had vanished over a distant hill. Then he turned slowly, and carried the boxes into the hut. He placed them in a corner, stacking them carefully, and neither he nor Onga touched them again. When Zerg came strutting in waving an ornt he had caught, radiant with the frank pride of



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his three summers, he approached them curiously. Onga shouted him away.

They arose in darkness, and when the first dim light of dawn touched the top of one-tree hill they awoke Zerg and his sister, and made the party.

One box, the heaviest, contained food—delicious smoked meats, and bread, and a cake with awesome patterns traced upon it in color. They superstitiously held back from the cake, and might never have tasted it had not one of Zerg's greedy little hands snaked out and broken off a large piece. After that they devoured it, smacking their lips over the sweet, melting texture. They ate meat and bread, but the other contents of the box were odd, circular objects that Harg's puzzled fingers found no way to open.

The other boxes had the gifts, cloth, lengths and lengths of it, so finely woven and brightly colored that Onga regarded it open-mouthed, and sat fingering it until they had finished making the party. There was a doll for Rirga, a life-sized, sky-baby doll that frightened her, and she would only toddle up to it and touch it quickly and scurry away. There was a knife for Harg, long, glimmering and sharp, and a hatchet, and fish hooks of the kind that the sky-men used with such wonderful fortune. For Zerg there were clothes, sky-man clothes, that made him a sad little miniature sky-man, and they would have laughed had they been making joy.

And there was a tiny thing-that-crawls, with a tiny sky-man riding in it, and when Zerg fumbled with it with curious, prodding fingers it suddenly emitted a loud, grinding noise, and he dropped it, and they all stared in amazement as it crawled away across the packed dirt floor of the hut.

Satisfied that they had made the party, they put all except Zerg's gifts back into the boxes, and started off on the long, faltering walk to the River, with Zerg wearing his sky-man clothes and clutching the still-grinding thing-that-crawls.

At the River they skirted the mud huts of the natives and went to the shining, round-roofed huts that the sky-men had made. There were other families there, all with a child of Zerg's summers, and they huddled together in a long, strange hut while the children were undressed and sky-men and sky-women in white looked at them, and handled strange, glimmering objects. Then they were outside, by a towering thing-from-the-sky, and a sky-man was telling them quietly that they must make their farewell with Zerg.



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Zerg, seeing tears in his mother's eyes, wept frantically, and Onga proudly wiped away her tears, and Zerg's, and firmly pushed him away.

There was weeping in other families, and Buga, who had had three daughters born to her in a miraculous birth, fell to the ground and rolled hysterically in the dust because the sky-men were taking all three.

An anguish of fright shook little Zerg when he reached the thing-from-the-sky. He shrieked and kicked wildly as he was carried up the steep metal slope, and when he reached the top a sky-lady in white picked him up and lifted him kindly for a last look at his family. And when he continued to scream and kick she took his hand and moved it up and down in a final, pathetic gesture before she disappeared with him into the yawning opening.

When the last struggling child had made its sobbing, wailing trip up the slope, the opening was closed. The sky-men moved them all back to the edge of the meadow. Fire flashed around the thing-from-the-sky, and thunder roared, and it lifted upwards until it became a shining speck and disappeared.

Harg and Onga plodded slowly homewards. Onga walked with her eyes on the rippling dust, and Harg stopped, now and then, to gaze futilely up into the sky. Onga clutched the sleeping Rirga tightly in her arms, and she knew that both Rirga and the child that stirred within her would make that frightening journey into the unknown. And she sobbed soundlessly, "What do they do with them? *What do they do with them?*"

I.

THOMAS Jefferson Sandler III looked out of his window on the ninety-eighth floor of the Terra-Central Hotel, and saw the planet Earth at close range for the first time in fifteen years. To be sure, he'd had his feet on genuine terra firma the night before, at the space port, and he'd flown from the port to the hotel —but that was a different Earth. An artificial Earth. A planet or a woman, he thought, never looks the same by daylight.

He swept his gaze over the welter of towers and spires that glittered brightly in the early-morning sunlight, watched the precisely stratified air traffic, and leaned forward to peer at the scurrying microbes in the street below.

"Earth," he said softly, and strained his eyes at the horizon. The city stretched as far as he could see, and farther. Galaxia, the greatest city on Earth. The greatest city in the galaxy. Its



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site had once been a desert, the guide books said. And now it was a garden spot, a prime tourists' attraction, and the holy city of cities for businessmen and politicians.

"Capital of the galaxy," he murmured, and turned his gaze to the glistening white government buildings and green parks that stretched across the heart of Galaxia in an unbroken chain. He'd heard violent protests in the more distant parts of the galaxy about having a capital planet in such an out-of-the-way sector, but that didn't concern him. They could move it four galaxies away, for all he cared.

"Home," he said, and repeated the word doubtfully. That was why he was here. That was why he'd made the long trek back across the light years, to see Earth again. To see his home. And he stood looking out at the snowy puffs of cloud and the delicate blue sky, and felt an overwhelming surge of disillusionment. Why should this planet be home to him? He turned away from the window and sang softly, mouthing the words in disgust.

"Home is that place
In deepest space
Where memories burn.
Home is a sigh
For a color of sky,
And a will to return."

And he ended by cheerfully damning the planet Earth, and adding a few choice curses for little Marty Worrel.

He'd run into Marty on a dozen worlds, or fifty, or a hundred. It seemed that anywhere he went he met Marty Worrel—if he happened into a dive that was cheap enough, and dirty enough, and illegal enough. Worrel was a man Sandler's age, with a wrinkled, ageless face and an insatiable thirst for alcohol. Inveterate wanderer of the galaxy, man of superb, hopelessly squandered talents, brilliant exponent of disillusionment, disgustingly enslaved alcoholic—that was little Marty. He could have been a genius at almost anything, if he'd worked at it. But all he ever worked at was a bottle.

Sandler had last encountered Worrel on Kranil, and the shabby little fellow had managed to stay sober long enough to write a song. Or perhaps he had tossed it off in a state of exhilarated intoxication. The facts of Worrel's activities were always hard to come by.

But he had written the song, and Sandler had met Worrel in a tough spacers' dive near the Kranil City space port, and heard a slatternly prostitute give the song its first public performance. *Homing Song*, Worrel



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had called it, and like most of Worrel's conversation the words were sometimes immortal poetry and sometimes nonsense, but the melody was a haunting, soaring masterpiece of poignant emotion. It entwined itself into Sandler's consciousness and defied eviction. He couldn't have forgotten it if he'd wanted to, because it swept across the galaxy on hyperdrive, and everywhere Sandler went he heard it. Even on Earth. He'd heard it the night before, in the hotel's Martian Room, sung with enticing gestures by a tall, sedate-looking blonde.

It was the song that brought Sandler to Earth. Its words had pounded away at him, home . . . home . . . home, and its melody had tormented him, and finally he had signed on a run across half the galaxy to Earth. To home. And now that he was there, he knew that he had no home, and the bitter realization pained and frustrated him.

He was Pilot First Class T. Sandler, and his brightest memories were the blur of unidentified stars, and the sweeping emptiness of space—meaning anywhere or nowhere—and he didn't give a spacer's damn where he went. Or as he'd heard another spacer put it, home was the nearest planet with a breathable atmosphere.

Sandler dropped into a chair, and visiphoned the space port. He reported to Inter-galactic Transport, and gave his name and code number. "I want the first assignment that'll get me off this damned planet," he said.

The dispatcher chuckled, did some checking, and said, "You're stuck here for forty-eight hours more. That's the best I can do."

"I'll take it," Sandler said, and cut off.

He walked back to the window, and looked out at the soft blue sky of Earth. "As long as I'm here," he told himself, "I might as well do some sightseeing. I certainly won't be coming home again."

The cabby leaped in front of him as he came out of the hotel, gripped his lapel, and babbled with pathetic, well-rehearsed enthusiasm. "Ground tour? See everything you want to see. Stop anytime you want, and look around. Can't do that on an air tour. I'm an expert, I am. I can show you anything in Galaxia worth seeing. Make a day of it, and see all the sights. What d'ya say, Mister? Reasonable rates. Three credits an hour, and you get a personally guided tour. Stop off . . ."

"Let's go," Sandler said.

The cabby ceremoniously escorted Sandler to a shabby ground car, got him seated, and took his place in front. He beam-



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ed with triumph. "Yes, sir. Where to first, sir?"

"Just drive around," Sandler said.

"Ever been in Galaxia before?"

"Can't remember. Might have been, when I was a kid."

"Then you come from Earth?"

"Originally, yes."

The cabby seemed vaguely disappointed—as if he might have to curb his enthusiasm somewhat in describing Earth's wonders to a native Earthling. "Well, then," he said. They were gliding smoothly along Vega Boulevard towards Government Circle, where two dozen stellar boulevards converged. "Art Institute, Galactic Museum of Natural History—they got stuff there that gives you nightmares for weeks. There are all the government buildings, of course. Congress isn't in session, but they take visitors through the House of Congress on tours. Then there's the Museum of Space Travel . . ."

"That might be interesting. Let's try that one."

The cabby nodded, and their speed picked up somewhat. Sandler leaned back against the worn cushions and idly watched the buildings flow past him, the elegant shops, the towering, luxury hotels, the sprawling office buildings from which galaxy-wide businesses were directed, and occasionally behind a high wall and park-like blur of greenery the Earth residence of a galactic multibillionaire, or the official residence of a cabinet minister.

They made a three-quarter circuit of Government Circle, passed the vast House of Congress, and started up the spacious parkway called Government Mall.

"Shorter this way," the cabby said.

Sandler doubted it, but he said nothing. The mall was beautiful. Flowering trees from a hundred planets, or perhaps a thousand, dotted the sweep of sparkling green grass. The splendid government buildings stood at regular intervals, surrounded by small parks. Each building was in a style of architecture native to a planet of the Galactic Federation, and its park was landscaped with such specimens of that planet's plant life as lavish care could keep flourishing on Earth.

They drove down Government Mall for a mile, and turned right onto Luna Avenue, and Sandler raised his eyes from a cluster of purple-leaved shrubs to briefly glimpse the facade of the government building they were passing. The shock of recognition jolted him.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The cabby glanced around at the traffic, and wailed, "Can't stop here!"

"That building—back there,



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on the right. Can we stop anywhere close to it?"

"Should be able to."

They turned off, followed a curving drive, and entered a two-level parking pavilion. Lower level, ground cars; upper level, air cars.

"What building is this?" Sandler asked.

The cabby consulted a map. "The Ministry of Public Welfare."

Puzzled, Sandler reached for the map. "Never knew there was such a thing," he said. He found their location on the map, and handed it back to the cabby.

He wondered what memory he could have of this building. Could he have seen a similar structure on some other world—its native world? If so, why should a passing glimpse of it unsettle him?

"I want to look around," he said, opening the door. Uneasiness flickered in the cabby's face, and Sandler grinned, and handed him a ten-credit note. "There's pay for two hours, with a nice tip. We haven't been out half an hour, yet. If I'm back any time during the next hour and a half, I'll expect to find you waiting."

The cabby's head bobbed. "Right," he said, and pulled a newspaper out of a storage compartment.

Sandler stepped onto an escalator, and rode up to the air car level. The building was enormous, a three-quarter circle stretching its arm about the parking pavilion. It was undistinguished in every way except one. Its windows were the darnedest thing Sandler had ever seen.

Only he had seen them—somewhere.

They were circular, but each circle was punched in at the top by a stabbing indentation. Sandler said aloud, "Like sticking your finger in an arnel cake." And then, startled, "What the hell is an arnel cake?"

A passerby spun around and regarded him strangely, and Sandler shrugged and rode the moving ramp into the building. It seemed to be nothing more or less than a vast office building. Clicking machines could be heard through open doors, writing letters, making records, sorting, filing. Occasionally a pretty junior secretary darted out of a room, stepped onto the ramp, and rode away purposefully. Closed doors were marked with a man's name, a fancy title, and the word, "Private." Sandler rode from one end of the building to the other, and back again, and stepped off where a glowing sign and an arrow pointed at the auditorium.

He recognized the room as



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soon as he stepped through the doorway. He recognized the myriad of globes that hung from the ceiling, dark because the room was not in use, but with planetary markings of a myriad of worlds dimly visible on their exteriors. He recognized the curving plastic front of the control room that looked down upon the stage. He recognized the plushy seats, and the flecks of gold that ran through the rich brown tapestry. He recognized . . .

He moved down the aisle, sat down, and leaned forward. When had it all happened? This life, or another one?

A bloated, bald-headed man—Mister Minister, they called him—with a loud, sonorous voice that rose and fell in endless gyrations. A nurse, with kindly eyes and a warm smile, and a body that had a friendly roundness despite the white stiffness of her dress. A small boy who hid behind the nurse, and clung frantically to her skirts. A tall, thin, haughty-looking woman with fur on her dress, bending over and staring at the boy, and saying, "Aren't his ears a little pointed?" A gruff-looking doctor in a white coat. Other people dashing in and out, a moving blur of faces.

Mr. Minister: "You're an important woman this morning, Mrs. Sandler. You're the five millionth mother to adopt a child through the Ministry of Public Welfare."

Mrs. Sandler: "I still think his ears are pointed."

The Doctor: "No more than yours are."

Mrs. Sandler: "Well, I suppose I'll have to take him. I've waited three years, and I expected to wait two or three years more. He'll have to do. But I hate getting one so old. They always have so many nasty habits that have to be broken—or so I've been told. If one could only get them when they're babies, then they could be brought up properly."

Mr. Minister (horrified): "What's that? You wanted a *baby?*"

Mrs. Sandler: "Of course I wanted a baby. But I knew I couldn't get one. But I still couldn't help hoping."

Mr. Minister: "If she wanted a baby, why didn't you get her a baby?"

The Doctor: "If she wanted a baby, why didn't she have one herself?"

Mrs. Sandler: "I didn't come here to be insulted!"

Mr. Minister: "Why didn't you get her a baby?"

The Doctor: "There aren't any within light years of here—not for adoption. We tried, once, and the mortality rate was horrify-



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ing. So now we don't take a child until it's two or three."

Mr. Minister: "Well, if that's the way it has to be—we've kept the visiscope men waiting long enough, I guess. These films will be run all over the galaxy, you know. Does the boy know his lines?"

Nurse: "He knows them perfectly."

Mr. Minister: "Say your lines, boy."

The boy: "Won't!"

Nurse: "He'll be all right, sir."

Mr. Minister (whispering): "Now get this, brat. We're going in there in front of the cameras, and you're going to do exactly what the nurse has told you, or I'll bat your ears off! That better be clear!"

Eyes half-closed, Sandler stared vacantly at the stage. Had he really stood there as a boy, and chanted his lines like a very small robot? Had he ridden down the hall ramp beside the tall, unfriendly woman, cringing at the coldness of her hand on his? Had he stood in the parking pavilion beside the shining air car, and looked back at the building's odd windows, and thought, "Like sticking your finger in an arnel cake?"

A song unwound itself slowly in his mind, a lament of saddened beauty that had brought him halfway across the galaxy, home to Earth, where he had no home.

Home is a sigh
For a color of sky,
And a will to return.

"For a color of sky," he mused. Not the pale blue sky of Earth, or the infinite shades of blue and lavender and green and yellow and red that he had seen in his tireless treks across space. A blue sky that was not blue. A touch of green in the sunset, and a touch of pink at the dawn, and bright promise of the day to come.

He rode the ramp to the end of the hallway, and stopped at an information desk. The young lady in charge smiled encouragingly, and Sandler said, "I have a problem. I was an adopted child, and I'd like to find who my real parents were, and where I come from."

Her smile faded. "You were adopted through the Ministry of Public Welfare?"

"Yes. Right here in this building."

"We only discuss these cases with the adopting parents."

"They're both dead."

"I see. Would you fill out this card, please?"

She dropped the card into a slot, and less than a minute later it flipped out of a delivery chute. Stamped across its face in bright



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red letters were the words, "File Negative."

"Evidently no such records were kept," the girl said. "Sorry."

II.

THE blonde had finished her song, and she was wandering about the Martian Room, chatting with the guests, acting as an informal hostess. Sandler sat at an out-of-the-way table, half concealed behind a bushy, fern-like plant, and the blonde walked past without seeing him, glanced back, and turned towards his table.

"You look lonely," she said, sliding into the chair opposite him.

Sandler smiled. The music was playing softly in the background, some of the exotic plants gave off pleasing scents, and he had just finished a delicious terrestrial steak. But she was right, if the baffling emptiness he felt could be called loneliness, then he had it bad.

"You're a spacer, aren't you?"

"Yep. Here today, light years away tomorrow. A poor insurance risk, a poor matrimonial risk, and in the eyes of the politicians, a generally poor citizen."

"According to the politicians, you aren't a good citizen unless you vote the right way."

"Maybe that's it. I'm always in space on election day. Have some dessert with me?"

"That's nice of you. But no. I'll have some coffee, though, if you don't mind."

Sandler touched a button, and gave the order. Seconds later a server rolled across the room and gently attached itself to his table.

Sandler leaned back and studied the girl, and she met his gaze effortlessly, unembarrassed. She was considerably older than he had thought—thirty, at least. Her blonde hair was a darkish shade, which suggested that it might be natural—except that there was a brilliant, almost bluish sheen to it. He tossed the problem aside. A man could go crazy, speculating about a woman's hair.

"I heard you sing that same song last night," he said. "Do you like it?"

"Everyone likes it. I sing it four or five times a night."

"It's an idiotic song," Sandler said. "Some of the words are nonsense."

"The words are beautiful."

Sandler chanted in a mocking sing-song, "Home is a light across the night of love enshrined. Home is the smart of tears, and a heart of faith left behind. Explain that, please."

"Feelings can't be explained. You've never had a home."

"You're right. I haven't. I can



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hardly remember my life before I was adopted—I was too young. And I never got along with my foster parents, so I ran away to space when I was sixteen."

"That's odd," she said. She plucked a handkerchief from her bosom, blew her nose loudly, and added, "Dammit!"

"Something wrong?"

"I had a man. Government worker, fairly high up and doing well. We were going to get married and raise a big family. Then this song came along, and all of a sudden he had to go home. Only he didn't have any home. Like you, he was adopted, and he never knew where he came from. But he was determined to go, and off he went. I haven't heard from him since."

"If he was a government worker, maybe he was able to find out where he came from."

"I don't think he even tried. At least, when he left he didn't know where he was going."

"You should have gone with him."

"He wanted me to. But that song does things to me, too. I'm from Earth, from a small town on the other side of the planet, and do you know what I'm going to do? I'm leaving this place at the end of the month, and going home. I'm going to buy out a little restaurant, and marry some local man, if there are any available, and make a home for as many children as I can have."

"The words are idiotic," Sandler said. "It must be the melody."

"Odd that it doesn't do anything to you. I thought it affected everyone."

"It brought me back to Earth, thinking I was coming home. Except that this planet isn't home. Not to me. At the Ministry of Public Welfare, today, I tried to find out where I came from. They say they have no record of it."

"They're lying, then. The government has records of everything."

"Are you certain about that?"

"Positive. I haven't lived in Galaxia for ten years for nothing. Complain to your congressman."

"Congress isn't in session. Besides, spacers don't have congressmen."

"Complain to one of the congressmen-at-large. Tell him you are a traveling salesman, or something."

"I might do that," Sandler said. "Thanks. And good luck with the restaurant. And the large family."

She nodded, and moved on to the next table. Sandler waited around, and heard her sing the *Homing Song* once more before he went up to his room.

As a spacer, Sandler consider-



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ed the popular concepts of night and day to be awkward frames of reference. His living habits were built around duty time and free time, and during his free time he slept when he felt like it, and generally conducted his life to suit his own convenience.

It irritated him to have his living habits imposed upon by such an arbitrary thing as a planet's period of revolution. The dusters—as spacers referred to non-spacers—were always making appointments for times when Sandler preferred to sleep, and offices and stores were only too frequently closed when he felt like transacting business.

He was mildly irked, but in no way surprised, when he arrived at the Congressional Office Building, to find no humans present except a score of weary custodians who were charting the routes of their robot cleaners by the flickering lights of control panels. He waited, got into conversation with the clerks as they arrived, and so charmed half a dozen young ladies that appointments with any of fifty congressmen were his for the asking.

Congressman Ringlow, a big, blustery, man-of-the-people type, inclined his shaggy head at Sandler and pointed at a chair. "Mr. Sandler? T. J. Sandler?" he said.

"That's correct."

"Thomas Jefferson Sandler?"

"The third."

"I knew your father."

"My foster father," Sandler said. "I knew him too—vaguely."

The congressman stiffened. "He was a close friend of mine," he announced haughtily. "I remember talking to him about you, just after you ran away. He was very disappointed in you."

"We disappointed each other."

"Yes. Well, I suppose there are always two sides to a disagreement. What can I do for you?"

"I was at the Ministry of Public Welfare, yesterday, trying to find out a few things. Such as where I came from, originally, and who my real parents were. I was told that no record was kept of this information."

"I can understand your wanting to know. But I can't very well help you if there's no record."

"I've been reliably informed—" he smiled, remembering the singer's confident assertion "—that the government always keeps records. I feel that I'm entitled to that information, and I resent being lied to."

The congressman stiffened again. His jaw dropped, and he stuttered, "Here! That's rather strong language."

"I'm beginning to feel rather strongly about this."

The congressman fussed with



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the papers on his desk, got up to stare out of the window, and spoke thoughtfully with his back to Sandler. "Your father—foster father—was a decent person. I think he'd have wanted you to have that information if you wanted it. I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you. You can reach me at the Terra-Central Hotel. Or leave a message there, if I'm not in."

The message was waiting when Sandler got back to the hotel. Congressman Ringlow had checked with the Ministry of Public Welfare. No records had been kept on the background of a child placed out for adoption by the Ministry. This was a long-established government policy, pursued in the best interest of all concerned. The congressman offered his regrets.

Sandler took an air cab out to the space port, reported at the offices of the Interplanetary Transport Company, and presented his resignation. He collected his back pay and pay for accumulated leave time, and withdrew his retirement and savings funds. He converted most of this small fortune into Inter-galactic Travelers' Checks, which could be cashed anywhere in the galaxy with no identification other than a reasonable number of fingers to match the ten fingerprints on the checks.

From the space port he flew directly to the Ministry of Public Welfare. He demanded a personal interview with the Minister. After a series of awkward interviews with underlings, during which he became increasingly adamant, he obtained an appointment with the third assistant to the fourth sub-minister. He was shown into the office of a long-faced young man who squinted timidly at Sandler through bulging contact lenses. His pale countenance had a comical look of near-fright.

"It seems," he said shyly, examining a piece of paper, "that you made a certain inquiry at the information desk yesterday."

"I did," Sandler said.

"You did not accept the information which was furnished. You went to Congressman Ringlow, and asked him to obtain further information for you."

"I did."

"And you still aren't convinced that we don't have the information to give you."

"I am not. And until I am convinced, you're going to continue to hear from me."

"I have this for you," the official said. "It's a photograph of your record card. This card represents the Ministry's complete record on any adoption case. You will find here all the information that is available with regard to your background. We've had so



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many inquiries of late— many quite as persistent as yours— that we've decided to supply similar photographs to all persons inquiring."

Sandler took the photograph, and glanced over it quickly. Medical report on the child, height, weight, description, fingerprints. Report on the foster parents. Follow-up investigations. A crisp notation on his running away at the age of (approximately) 16. End of record.

"Satisfied now?" the official asked hopefully."

"I'll be perfectly satisfied," Sandler said, "after I've compared this with the original."

"I'm afraid that's impossible. No authorized person can be permitted . . ."

Sandler's hand was in his pocket. He moved it slowly, and revealed the bulging muzzle of a flame pistol. The official's eyes widened, and his throat made gurgling noises.

Sandler spoke softly. "You have a master file screen on the wall. I'd hate to have to use this. At this range, there wouldn't be much left of you but your head and two legs. It would probably make me sick. Are you going to dial the file number, or shall I?"

"There's nothing there you don't already have."

"Photographs are very easily tampered with. I don't like this blank space in the upper right corner. Dial."

The official dialed. In his nervousness he got the wrong card, and had to dial again. Sandler made a quick comparison, and grinned triumphantly. "Just alike, you say? Look in the right hand corner. 'Source 187.' Now what does that mean?"

The official quickly darkened the screen. "I haven't the faintest idea."

"It refers to the place of my origin, doesn't it?"

"I don't know." He looked at the flame pistol, and added quickly, "It might."

"There'll be a list of planetary sources somewhere. Where is it?"

"I don't know. The Ministry hasn't handled any adoptions for years, and I don't know anything about them."

Sandler decided to believe him. "Why all the secrecy about this?"

"I don't make policy. I just follow orders."

"A lucky thing for you." He pocketed the pistol. "Now listen —I'm not going to tell anyone where I got this information as long as you keep it quiet. If you make a complaint, I'll say you gave it to me voluntarily. Is that clear?"

"Certainly."

"Get away from your desk,



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then." Sandler found the recorder, and erased their conversation. "If anyone asks you, you forgot to turn it on. I thank you for your cooperation."

He walked out, and rode the ramp back to the parking lot. No alarm sounded. A few minutes later he was back at his hotel. He rented a private pool, floated lazily in the water staring at the brightly colored designs in the tiled ceiling, and sang lustily. "From far I come, a drifting scum upon the void. No home have I, no world to cry, nor asteroid."

He wanted to go home. He was going home. And the far-reaching, all-powerful, omniscient galactic government was stubbornly opposed to his so much as knowing where that home might be. He formulated several crucial questions, and he began to make plans to shake some satisfactory answers out of responsible officials. By the neck, if necessary.

III.

THE blonde sang a different song in the Martian Room that night, and afterwards she stopped at Sandler's table and said glumly, "Hear the news?"

"What news is that?"

"Ministry of Public Welfare. Censorship Department. The *Homing Song* is bad for public morals. Further performances prohibited."

"How could that song harm anyone?"

"It couldn't, unless it's bad to make people want to go home. And since it isn't, I figure there is something about it that might hurt the government. You figure it out."

Sandler shook his head. It was of a pattern, along with the Ministry's refusal to give him the information he wanted. But there were pieces missing—too many pieces. "What would happen if you sang the song?" he asked.

"It would cost me a month's pay. I might even get a prison term, if the judge wanted to be tough about it. As a matter of fact, I could get into trouble for telling you this. The censorship is to be kept strictly confidential. The government seems to think the song will run off and hide if professional performers stop singing it."

"That's ridiculous. Everyone in the galaxy knows it by this time."

"Try that argument on a government edict."

"What would happen if the public demanded the song? I mean, supposing the people here start calling for it the next time you're on?"

"I still couldn't sing it. But it would be fun!"



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"We'll try it, and see."

He waited until she moved out for her next song, and as the music started, he called, *"Homing Song!"*

A rumbling murmur of approval welled up about the room. The blonde ignored it, and as she started her song, Sandler called out again. The guests began to chant, *"Homing Song!"* and drowned out the music.

Sandler sat back to enjoy the confusion, felt a firm hand on his shoulder, and found himself staring at the credentials of a government public investigator. He paid his check, and followed along meekly.

Outside the door, he faced the burly officer and demanded, "What's the charge?"

"Disturbing the peace. Endangering public morals."

"You'll have some fun proving that, fellow, with everyone in the place doing the same thing."

"I'll prove it." He patted his pocket. "I have a recording. You started the disturbance."

"If you can convince a judge that it was a disturbance."

At Police Central Sandler was registered and passed along to the night court. The white-haired judge listened to the charges, had the evidence played, and questioned the investigator incredulously.

"You say the Censorship Department has prohibited this song, but the public has not been informed. This man certainly could not have known that he was asking the singer to do something unlawful. There is no evidence that the hotel guests or the management regarded his actions as a public disturbance. In fact, the evidence points to the contrary." He paused. "I doubt that the courts will uphold the Department of Censorship order against the *Homing Song*, but I see no need to concern myself with that question now. Case dismissed."

"I intend to appeal the dismissal," the investigator said haughtily.

"The law states that you may make such an appeal at your discretion. I shall schedule a hearing for ten tomorrow morning, before Judge Corming, and I recommend that in the meantime you give some consideration to the meaning of the word, 'discretion.' "

As a final insult to the investigator, he fixed bail at one hundred credits. Sandler posted the hundred credits, caught a ground cab, and then dismissed it two blocks from the station. He strolled slowly along Vega Boulevard, and several times he stopped to look cautiously behind him.

The investigator's presence in the Martian Room had been no



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accident. His being arrested on the flimsiest pretext had been no accident. The government wanted him out of the way, and if Judge Corming refused to cooperate the case would be appealed further. Or the police would fabricate new charges. If he didn't want to spend the next few years trying to break rocks with a light hammer on a low-gravity satellite, he'd have to move cautiously.

He heard strains of music, and he paused before a small cafe. He stepped inside, downed two drinks, and lost his newly-acquired caution. He turned to the musicians, and shouted *"Homing Song!"*

A near riot followed, and Sandler hurried out into the night. He followed the same procedure in another cafe, and a stylish restaurant, and a smoke-filled tavern. By the time he got back to his hotel, two dozen eating and drinking places along Vega Boulevard were rocking to the chant, *"Homing Song!"*, police cars were swooping down from all directions, and Sandler was in a mildly intoxicated condition.

From his hotel room, he looked down at the clusters of police cars along Vega Boulevard, and tried to make out what was happening. Above him the sky was clear, the stars bright and coldly distant.

"Somewhere out there is where I belong," he told himself. "And I'm going back. It may be only a dump of a planet, but if it's mine, that's where I'm going."

A moonlet drear
With atmosphere
Is sacred ground.
The barren loam
Of any home
Is flower-crowned.

An aircar darted across the face of the hotel building, slowed abruptly, and dropped past his window. He threw himself to the floor as a heavy flame gun burned the air above him, wrecked his bed, and bored into the far wall. He dove for his baggage and came up with his own flame pistol in his hand, but the aircar was already out of sight.

The hotel manager charged in a few minutes later, surveyed the damage, and stood fretfully wringing his hands.

"I think," Sandler said calmly, "that someone doesn't like me. It might be better for both the hotel and myself if I were to check out."

The manager agreed enthusiastically.

Traveling a circuitous route to cover himself, Sandler checked in to a shabby spacers' hotel near the space port. He register-



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ed under an assumed name, paid for one night in advance, and settled down in his cramped room to make plans.

He had no intention of placing himself in the hands of the police again, and when he failed to appear in court, he would be a bona fide fugitive from justice. The government would begin searching for him openly. His picture would be circulated, transportation agencies would be notified, and port officials alerted. His situation would grow more perilous by the minute. Whatever he did, he would have to move fast.

At dawn he carried his belongings to the space port. He left them in a rented locker, descended to a lower level, and at a dispenser invested in a handful of tokens for the only anonymous means of transportation in Galaxia—the overburdened pneumatic underground railroad. The masses facetiously referred to it as the air train.

Sandler changed trains five times, and rode to the end of the line in a distant part of Galaxia. In a public visiphone booth, he hung his coat over the visual transmitter, and made four calls.

A distinguished Galaxia lawyer: "My dear sir, we might be able to establish in court your right to information about your parents and the planet of your origin. But what good would that do us if government officials were to swear under oath that no record of this information has been kept? You'd win your point without winning a thing."

The editor of a leading opposition newspaper: "We're always happy to embarrass the administration, but we don't want to embarrass it *that* much. The Department of Censorship would close us down. I advise you to get away from Earth while you are still healthy."

A prominent visiscope commentator: "The less I know about this, the better I'll like it."

An opposition congressman: "Your case isn't the first I've heard of. Sure, we could stir things up. But it wouldn't do you a bit of good, and the Expansionist Party would spend a billion to defeat me next election. Better forget about it, at least as far as I'm concerned.

Sandler checked visiscope and the papers, and found no mention of himself, or of the disturbances over the *Homing Song*. Strict silence was being enforced. He wondered if the government would be satisfied if he quietly faded away and was heard from no more. There certainly would be a galaxy-wide Confidential on him. Never again would he be able to use his own name, or land openly on a planet,



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without undergoing a constant and humiliating harassment.

"And if that's the way things stand," he told himself, "it won't matter much if I make them worse. I think I'd better have a quiet talk with the Minister of Public Welfare."

But he could visualize that sedate individual shaking his head mockingly, and saying, "Sorry. We have no records. No records at all. Be very happy to help you, if I could. I knew your foster father. But without records . . ."

Truth serum was the answer. Truth serum would make him talk quickly and truthfully. But there were a multitude of types with complicated medical and investigative uses, and none of them were sold to casual purchasers with no questions asked.

Sandler turned towards the escalator. He would have to find himself a doctor. A doctor would be able to give him exactly what he wanted.

He prowled the streets until he found a doctor's office. He intentionally avoided looking at the doctor's name, and concentrated on the faded word, "Psychiatrist," as he climbed the worn stairway. He opened the door quietly, looked in, and closed it. The consultation room was packed with the slovenly dregs of mankind. The aged, the infirm, the addicts, the alcoholics, all shabbily dressed, all waiting with dumbly inexpressive faces for the force of healing to probe their crumbling minds.

The hallway reeked of a strange mixture of odors, indefinable and probably unmentionable. On the street level there had been a pawn broker's establishment. On the floors above were dwelling units. He could hear squalling children and snarling mothers. This was the other side of the polished, gemlike capital of the galaxy. The night side. The foul, indescribable slum side.

Sandler edged his way along the filthy hallway, came to a second door, and again avoided the doctor's name. He pressed his ear to the door.

". . . Mrs. Schultz," a shrill male voice said. "Then I'll see you Tuesday at eleven."

Shuffling footsteps. A door opening. The shrill voice asking, "Who's next?" And then, as the visiphone gong chimed musically, "Just a moment, please."

The door closed. The visiphone mumbled inaudibly. The shrill voice piped, "What's that you say? Oh, pills! Yes, as soon as I can get there."

Footsteps moved urgently about the room, and suddenly approached the door. Sandler stepped back as the lock clicked, and raised his flame pistol. The



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doctor halted with the door half-opened, his wrinkled face transfixed with amazement. Sandler pushed through, and closed the door as the doctor backed away.

The doctor cackled mockingly. "I don't suppose, young man, that you've called for professional assistance."

"I want to buy something," Sandler said.

"You've come to the wrong place. I'm a psychiatrist. I don't keep narcotics in my office."

"I don't want narcotics," Sandler said.

"I have an emergency. A man has been injured in a brawl down the street. They call a psychiatrist to treat a bump on the head. But there aren't any other doctors in this neighborhood. Please state your business quickly."

He was a mere wisp of a man, gaunt, the pink of his head showing plainly through his sparse, white hair. Sandler remembered the riffraff in the consultation room, and regarded him with admiration. He was a real doctor. A doctor who lived only to serve.

He said firmly, "I want a hypodermic syringe and a maximum dose of truth serum."

The doctor scrutinized him with professional interest. "You don't look like a bad man."

"I'm a wronged man," Sandler said wearily. "I have harmed no one, but the police are looking for me. An agency of the government has tried to murder me. I ask you in the name of justice to sell me what I want, and forget about it."

"The police have truth serum," the doctor suggested.

"I've done everything I could to protect you. I don't know your name. I'm a stranger in Galaxia, and once I leave your office, I'll never be able to find my way back here."

"Even so, it would be safest for me to report it. Tomorrow—supposing I report it tomorrow?"

Sandler nodded.

"Well, then—I can't sell the things to you. Look." He got out a hypodermic syringe, and filled it. "I'm all ready for my next patient, now. And I get an emergency call, and in my hurry I forget to lock the door. I'm an old man, and I won't miss the thing until tomorrow. So?"

Sandler stepped aside, and the doctor hurried out. He grabbed the syringe, and slipped a fifty-credit note into the doctor's desk. From the general character of his patients, Sandler thought he might need the money.

Sandler hurried down the stairway, saw the doctor tottering along the street, and turned in the opposite direction.

There was no going back now. If no one would cooperate, he'd go straight to the top and handle it his way.



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## IV.

THE official residence of Jan Vildson, the Minister of Public Welfare, had a choice location at the intersection of Centaurian and Solar Avenues. The grounds were enclosed on three sides by a towering, vine-covered wall. On the fourth was a tall commercial building, its wall windowless as high as the eighth story.

Sandler had circled the place a dozen times during the afternoon, gaping like an awed tourist, while he made his plans. He'd expended a small fortune in air cab fares, riding back and forth to catch a passing glimpse of the mansion. He had prowled the neighborhood, setting up an escape route.

But he felt more determined than confident as he stood on Centaurian Avenue and watched the ground cab speed away. It was shortly before midnight, and clouds obscured Earth's moon—but the artifical "moons" that dotted the sky over Galaxia bathed the spacious avenue in a light that seemed brighter than daylight. He shouldered his heavy bag, and hurried towards the Minister's residence.

He reached the wall and crouched there under a steady whir of air traffic, seeking a shadow where there was none. From his bag he took a heavy, triangular-shaped building stone and tossed it so that its looping trajectory just cleared the wall. He tossed another and another, hoping that at least one would trigger the mansion's alarm system. He raced along the wall, tossing stones as he ran, and turned onto Solar Avenue. He could hear the alarm gong booming faintly, far away. He ran frantically, reached the far corner of the wall, and hauled himself up on the clinging vines.

He slid to the ground on the other side, and sprinted to the cover of some weird-looking, spiral-leaved shrubs. Men were dashing about at the far end of the grounds, and their shouts reached him faintly. He heard the excited yelp of a dog. Crouching, he ran from shrub to shrub, and finally hurled himself into the tall, sprawling density of a flower bed. The flowers were of some exotic species, and they were in full bloom. The heavy, sweet scent overpowered and stifled him, and he lay gasping for breath.

The alarm continued to sound. More men arrived, and a squadron of patrol cars swooped down and landed in an open space near the mansion. Sandler kept his head down, sank his fingers into the rich, moist soil, and waited.

His racing pulse counted off the minutes. The alarm stopped suddenly. Two of the searchers



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came trudging back, and met a third man near the gate.

"Some idiot threw stones over the wall," one of them said.

The patrol cars lifted gracefully, one at a time, circled, and moved off in formation. Other men came straggling back, in twos and threes. There was more grumbling conversation as they disappeared around the corner of the mansion.

A sentry resumed his plodding circuit of the grounds. With his head raised cautiously above the flowers Sandler timed his movements and began planning a route of approach.

His first sprint carried him across twenty feet of open lawn to the cover of a large tree. He moved in spurts, separated by maddening intervals of crouched waiting. Forty minutes later he was huddled in the scant shadow of a flowering bush, studying a balcony that extended out over an artistically landscaped terrace. At one side, flowering vines wove their way up a metal framework. Sandler watched the sentry, and waited.

The sentry moved out of sight behind the building. Sandler moved quickly, hauling himself up the vines. Thorns stabbed at him, ripping his hands and clothing. He staggered onto the balcony, and tried the door. It opened easily. He stepped through, and stood blinking in the uncertain light of a darkened room.

A beam of light shattered the darkness and struck his face, blinding him. "All right, Fritz. See if he's armed," a crisp voice said.

Sandler closed his eyes, and stood with fists clenched. Hands moved expertly over his body, spun him around roughly, and removed his pistol. The beam of light died as the lights in the room came on. There were three men watching Sandler alertly, and two of them had flame pistols leveled unwaveringly at his stomach.

The crisp voice spoke again. "You're a patient man, friend. But then—I'm a patient man myself. I've been watching you for the last half-hour." He turned to the others. "I can handle him. I'll call you if I need you. Leave us."

The door closed behind them, and he gestured with his pistol. "Now, then. You will sit down there, and place your hands on the table. Right. Jan Vildson is my name. Minister of Public Welfare. And you are Thomas Jefferson Sandler. What can I do for you?"

Jan Vildson was an elderly man, swarthy, robust-looking, without a touch of grey in his black hair. He looked perhaps sixty-five, Sandler thought, and



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that might be fifteen years younger than his age.

"You surprise me," Sandler said. "You hardly look like a scoundrel."

The Minister said seriously, "I was thinking the same about you, young man. I've known you for longer than you think. I knew your adopted father well. He had high hopes for you. On your performance of the last two days I would say you were quite capable of fulfilling his hopes. You show a commendable determination. It's a pity you squander it on trivialities."

"Odd to hear you calling my objective trivial," Sandler said. "Especially after the trouble the government is taking to make certain I fail."

The Minister seated himself on the opposite side of the wide table, and laid his pistol in front of him. "Trivial or not," he said, "your objective is rather futile. The information you want was destroyed years ago—long before I became Minister of Public Welfare."

"The planet of my origin is clearly indicated on my record card."

"The planet's *number* is indicated. The number refers to a list of several hundred planets from which orphan children were taken for adoption. The number has no meaning without that special list, and all copies of that list have been destroyed. So you see, your efforts are futile."

"Why was the list destroyed?"

The Minister shook his head slowly. "Perhaps for the most noble of reasons, or perhaps for stupid bureaucratic expediency. It doesn't matter. We can't undo it now. We can't undestroy something that's been destroyed. I'm sincere, and everyone else has been sincere, in telling you to forget the whole thing. That's all you can do."

He paused, and Sandler waited silently.

"Now here is what I suggest. You're in trouble, but it isn't serious trouble. I believe I can arrange to keep the whole affair quiet. I'll see that you get to the spaceport, and on an out-going ship. We could file more charges against you on the basis of your performance this evening, but I'm disposed to forget about that. After all, you are the son of an old friend. What do you say?"

"Will you answer a few questions?"

"Gladly, if I have the answers."

"The Department of Public Censorship is under your control, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Why have you banned performances of the *Homing Song*?"



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The Minister looked puzzled. "The *Homing Song?* Banned?"

"Bad for the public morals. Or so your censors say."

"I've heard the song. Who hasn't? But I don't recall anything—banned, you say. I'll have to look into that."

"What government official gave the order to have me murdered? Was it you?"

The Minister slowly rose to his feet. "Murdered? Someone ordered you murdered?"

"I was fired on from an air car. Fortunately, I ducked in time, but it made a mess of my hotel room."

The Minister dropped back into his chair. "That's not true," he protested. "It can't be true!"

Sandler dove across the table, and seized the pistol. He regained his seat, breathing heavily, and held the weapon under the table. "If your men check up, you'll tell them everything is all right," he said calmly.

The Minister had a hurt expression on his face. "You tricked me. I've tried to be nice to you, Sandler. I've given you every consideration . . ."

"Shut up!" Sandler snapped in return. I'm a nobody. However important my foster father may have been, I'm a nobody. All I want to do is go home. Why is the Federation Government determined to do anything up to and including murder to keep me from doing that? Why would it prefer me dead rather than answer any questions about my home planet?"

"I don't know," the Minister said. "What makes you think it's someone in the government that tried to kill you? That's brash libel."

"No one outside the government cares what I do. I haven't any other enemies. Now—the planet number is 187. What is it, and where is it?"

"I told you the truth. To the best of my knowledge, there isn't a copy of that list in existence. I can tell you no more."

Sandler loosened his shirt, and gripped the hypodermic syringe he had taped to his arm. "I've had enough of your kind of truth. Now I want my kind. Bare your arm, please."

The Minister straightened up in alarm. "What's that you have?"

"Truth serum. I mean you no harm, but I'm going to have the truth if I have to kill you to get it."

The Minister's frightened eyes stared at the needle. "You don't believe me?" he croaked. "Think of it. Old T. J.'s son calling me a liar. Do you know, Sandler, I held you on my lap when you weren't more than six years old?"

Sandler got to his feet, and



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dropped back into his chair as the screen on the far wall flickered to life. One of the Minister's guards glanced at them suspiciously. "Everything all right, sir? It looks like you might need us."

Sandler's hand tensed on the pistol.

"Everything all right," the Minister said weakly. The screen darkened.

Sandler rounded the table, and stood waiting. "Bare your arm," he ordered.

"That's dangerous," the Minister protested. He looked at Sandler's face, shrugged, and slipped out of his coat. "If that's all that will satisfy you . . ."

He rolled up his sleeve, and Sandler inexpertly jabbed the needle into his arm. He walked back to his chair, and tossed the syringe under the table.

He watched the Minister anxiously, and wished he'd gotten more information from the doctor. He hadn't any idea how much time the serum might require to take effect. The Minister leaned back in his chair, eyes closed, breathing deeply.

Sandler waited, watching the clock anxiously, and finally he said, "What is planet 187?"



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"Don't—know. List—destroyed."

"Who would have a copy of the list?"

"Destroyed—long ago."

"Why was the list destroyed?"

The Minister doubled up suddenly, clutching both hands to his heart. His breath came in whistling gasps, his face was white and taut, and his teeth were clenched in searing agony. Sandler dashed around the table, and bent over him in alarm.

He remembered too late that he had casually asked the doctor for a maximum dose of truth serum—and that a maximum dose might be too much for a man of eighty. It was too much. The Minister was dying.

Sandler hurried to the balcony and looked out across the grounds. The sentry was not in sight. He slid quickly to the ground, and ran. There was no time to worry about cover. He reached the wall, and was going over the top when a light flashed in the balcony's open door. At the same time the alarm gong boomed urgently.

Sandler drove himself in merciless, headlong flight for two long blocks to an air train station. He hurtled down the moving escalator stairs, thrust a token into the turnstile, and pushed through, glancing anxiously at the clock. He had spent an hour, that afternoon, memorizing train schedules. He was waiting on the right platform twenty-five seconds later when a train glided smoothly to a stop. He boarded it, transferred at the next station, and rode the trains until dawn, leaving a meandering, criss-crossing trail through subterranean Galaxia.

He spent the day in a squalid hotel, and started out that evening to weave another meandering trail out to the spaceport. He collected his belongings, and with the wile of a veteran spacer stowed away on a lumbering ore freighter that lifted at midnight for Mars. The freighter's crew smuggled him past Mars Customs, and he bought faked identity papers and shipped as a common spacer on a ship outward bound from the Solar System.

He stood in an observation port for a last, contemptuous look at Earth—a brittle spark thrown off by a shrinking sun.

V.

THOMAS Jefferson Sandler III drifted slowly across the galaxy, a derelict caught in weirdly eccentric currents. He shipped as a spacer when he found a post. He stowed away. Once he joined a hopeful group of immigrants in their cramped quarters. He piloted a cargo of smuggled gold from Lamruth to



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Emmoy. On Kilfton he was recognized, and he killed two guards in escaping.

Or perhaps they recovered. He never heard what happened to them, or cared.

Twice he encountered Marty Worrel, but he cautiously kept his distance. The little musician had a pronounced talent for fomenting disturbances. As on Hillan, where he got up on a table in a crowded tavern and sang his *Homing Song*. Sandler made a hurried exit before the police appeared. He could not risk being associated with any kind of disturbance.

He drifted on, moving always outward from Earth, following the long axis of the galaxy. In Sector 187 he invaded the private residence of the Sector Commissioner, thinking that the number on his identification card might refer to sector, rather than to planet. The commissioner persisted in his declarations of ignorance with Sandler's fingers about his throat. Sandler left him unconscious, stowed away once more, and drifted onward. He waylaid a dozen sector Chiefs of Public Welfare. He attemped to bribe government officials, and he threatened them with violence and sudden death. And he learned nothing.

The months drifted by, and became years. Sandler moved from planet to planet, searching for a color of sky, for anything that would match his few blurred recollections of home. Hot worlds and cold, wet worlds and dry, he studied them hopefully from an observation port, wandered about their surfaces until disillusion seized him and he left without a backward glance.

Three years after leaving Earth, he stood staring at the dingy, gray face of a planet as the ship flashed downwards, and he felt depressed. Usually a new planet offered some hope, but not this one. Twisting clouds of dust erupted and slowly spread their heavy film across its surface. It was Stanruth, a barren, lifeless, waterless world. World rich in minerals, so there was a colony, and there were humans who sought wealth, and found it or failed to find it, and fled homewards.

No one would call Stanruth "home." But then—who could say? Some day, perhaps, children born on Stanruth might see it as a place of beauty.

> The barren loam
> Of any home
> Is flower-crowned.

To Sandler, it was no more than a stepping-stone that he must touch in passing. It was one strange world of many in the weary fabric of his exist-



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ence, of his coming and going, of his hiding, of his seeking and not finding.

The ship landed, and he tensed himself for the inevitable customs inspection. His handsome, young-looking face had undergone transformation. He had scarred it hideously. His head was shaven bald. He wore a bushy uncouth beard. His body was a weird gallery of spacer tattoos. But he knew that sooner or later a sharp-eyed official would recognize him, and his search would be over.

He passed through customs almost unnoticed, and moved on into the stark, treeless town. The building stones were fused sand. The streets were fused sand. Sand drifted everywhere, and even the feet of a slow-moving pedestrian kicked up clouds of dust.

Sandler entered a squalid tavern, where a tumbler of water cost a credit, and a bottle of good whiskey a small fortune. He glanced about the smoke-filled interior, and huddled in a dark corner he saw a familiar figure, the little man of enormous talent and small worth, Marty Worrel.

Worrel's apparent sobriety intrigued Sandler, and he slid onto a fused-sand bench across the table from him, and said, "Hello."

Worrel stared, no spark of recognition in his eyes. "Do I know you?"

Sandler leaned forward, and whispered, "From far I come, a drifting scum upon the void."

Worrel winced, and glanced about cautiously. "Whoever you are," he said, "you've changed."

"You haven't changed. I thought that song would make you a multi-millionaire, with a big estate and a dozen air cars. I suppose someone stole it from you. You've been wearing that same suit for the last four years. It doesn't even look as if you've had it off."

"Clothes," Worrel said disgustedly. "Rags to hide the body's immodesty. The soul fashions its own raiment." He signalled for drinks, and waved Sandler's money away. "I am a multi-millionaire," he said. "Someone copyrighted that song for me. I didn't even know about it. I have money in the banks of half the planets of the galaxy. And what is money? The dowry of evil. The prop of tyranny. The strangling nourishment of greed. It corrodes the soul. It buys a woman's honor and a man's integrity. It lays waste to the body and stifles happiness. We are wanderers all, we puny humans, seeking wealth to buy the unattainable. You want money? I'll give you money. Hell, I'll give it all to you."

He slumped forward, spilling



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his expensive whiskey, and sobbed brokenly with his face buried in his hands.

Sandler straightened up in alarm. "You're drunk," he said disgustedly.

"I'm always drunk. What else is there? One must be either drunk or sober, and I'm drunk. Money can buy *that*. Money buys whiskey and whiskey benumbs the senses and benumbed senses crave whiskey and whiskey requires money and money buys whiskey and whiskey benumbs the senses . . ."

He sobbed again, and began to sing, in a cracked, nasal voice. "Home is that place in deepest space where memories burn . . ."

Sandler leaned over and slapped Worrel's face. Worrel's head snapped back, and he shook himself, stared oddly at Sandler for a moment, and signalled for another drink.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"Seeking the unattainable. Without money."

"You are a wise man. A wise, noble, generous, virtuous, deserving, admirable, good, worthy, unculpable . . ." He paused, and squinted doubtfully. "What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't," Sandler said.

"No-Name. It's best that way. A name is but a label applied at birth through the connivance of dishonorable parents. I like you, No-Name. What did you say you were seeking?"

Sandler glanced about cautiously. More spacers had come in, and the place rocked with their boisterous laughter. Bartenders and serving girls were rushing about frantically. The dingy corner was completely ignored. Nevertheless, Sandler leaned forward and said in a whisper, "Home."

Worrel paused with his glass in mid-air. Suddenly he seemed to sober again. "We must talk," he said. He drained his glass, and screamed, "Bottle of whiskey!" A serving girl hurried over. Worrel paid her, and gripped Sandler's arm. "Come. We must talk."

He led Sandler out of the tavern, and down the dusty street. They entered, a shabby, sand-eroded rooming house, and climbed three flights of stairs to Worrel's room. It was virtually unfurnished. The bed was a pile of filthy blankets in one corner. In another corner was a pile of empty bottles. A bench of fused sand stood along one wall. Powdery dust covered everything in sight.

Worrel seated Sandler on the bench, hurried out, and came back with a pair of tumblers. He poured the drinks with trembling fingers, and squatted on the floor.



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"Tell me," he said. "Tell me everything."

Sandler sketched out the story of his frustrated efforts to find his home planet, carefully omitting any suggestion of criminal action.

"But you did find the number of your planet," Worrel said excitedly. "What is it?"

"187."

Worrel got slowly to his feet. He fumbled in an inside pocket, produced a card, and handed it to Sandler. A photograph of a Ministry of Public Welfare record card. Medical report on a child identified as Marty Worrel. Description, report on foster parents, follow-up investigations. And this photograph was complete. In the upper right corner Sandler read, "Source: 187."

Worrel snatched the card, and stood in front of Sandler, body tense, eyes gleaming, his small, wrinkled face alight with tremendous excitement. "Brother!" he whispered.

Sandler nodded slowly. "I suppose I could be your brother."

"And we have a sister. Come."

He gripped Sandler's arm, hurried him down a flight of stairs, and rushed him into a room on the floor below. This room was neatly furnished, tidy, almost free from dust. Its sole occupant was a young woman, who started up and hastily draped a robe over her bare limbs as they entered.

"Another one!" Worrel called. "Another 187!"

"No!" she exclaimed. She stared wide-eyed at Sandler, disbelief showing in her lovely face. "You look—well, so old to be a space-orphan."

"Space-orphan?" Sandler echoed.

"From far we come, a drifting scum upon the void," Worrel croaked. "Space-orphans are we, and space-orphans we shall ever be. Cast us adrift in time, wrap us gently in the empty shroud of space, and lull us to sleep with the clanging music of the spheres. No one cares, and nothing else matters. Home is a moonlet drear with atmosphere, and who gives a damn whether the homeless breathe or not?" He waved his bottle. "Let us drink to 187, somewhere on the bottom side of nowhere."

"You're drunk again, Marty," the girl sighed.

"I'm drunk *yet*," he corrected. "Oh. Introductions. Miriam, this is No-Name. No-Name, this is Miriam." He thrust his head forward and looked inquiringly at Sandler. "You're sure you haven't got a name?"

"My adopted name is Thomas Jefferson Sandler."

"So that's who you are. I remember. You're a pilot. You've changed. Your own mother



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wouldn't recognize you." He laughed shrilly.

"How did you find out you were both from 187?" Sandler asked.

"Bribery. Cost half a million. That's another use for money. It adapts itself to any dishonorable purpose."

Miriam was still watching Sandler, her disbelief giving way to frank suspicion. "Marty, are you sure he's—I mean, he looks so *old*."

"He's a fugitive from injustice," Worrel said. "That ages one. On the other hand, how *do* I know you came from 187?"

The girl turned her back to them, and whirled around suddenly with a small pistol in her hand. "We can't afford to take chances," she said sharply. "Prove it!"

Sandler moved over to the wall, and sat down on a bench. "My papers are forged," he said. "I'm wanted on every planet in the galaxy for murder, attempted murder, assault on highly placed officials, smuggling, flouting of customs regulations, unlawful flight to avoid whatever charges may have been placed against me, and an odd assortment of other things. I had a photo of my record card, but I lost it long ago. What proof do you want?"

She hesitated. "Can you remember anything at all about—home?"

"A color of sky," Sandler said slowly, "that I can't describe. But if I saw it I think I'd know. I've tried many times to remember, but it's all vague. A mud hut, with narrow slits in the walls. A small boy hurrying proudly home carrying an ornt by the tail. A mother who is a shapeless figure without features, and who is also wonderful. A father who helps a small hand grip a spear that is much longer than the boy. An arnel cake. Not much, is it?"

The pistol disappeared. Miriam threw herself on him, gripped him tightly, and kissed him profusely.

"One of us," Worrel said, and chanted loudly, "three space-orphans are we. Three space-orphans we be. Two are you and one is me. I am a minority." He sat down on the floor, and tipped up the bottle.

"Stop it, Marty," Miriam pleaded. "Maybe he has some ideas. Maybe we can plan."

Worrel got up abruptly. "Plan," he said. "You have a plan?"

"No," Sandler said. "I'm just drifting. I've killed one man, and possibly more, and I've nearly choked several men to death, and all I can find out is that nobody knows. 187 is just a number. We'd be just as well off if



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we didn't know about it. Better off, maybe."

Worrel seemed oddly sober again. "I know a man," he said. "Commissioner of Sector 1531. He's an old man. He's been around a long time, and he knows something about the space-orphans. He goes around looking for them, and asking them questions. Me he won't talk to. Me he laughs at. You're a man of action. He won't laugh at you."

"I'll see him," Sandler said. "Who is he?"

"Name's Novin. Commissioner Novin. On Pronna."

"Then I'll go to Pronna."

"We'll all go to Pronna," Worrel said. "We'll leave today."

"There may not be a ship."

"There'll be a ship. I'll buy a ship, with my filthy, filthy money. When we find 187, I'll buy the planet, and throw the Federation off. I'll buy a space fleet, and demolish Earth. I'll buy paradise, and populate it with space-orphans. What sector do you suppose paradise is in? Is that another number no one remembers?" He sat down again, and tilted the bottle.

VI.

WORREL bought a ship, a rusted space-worn freighter. But Sandler had to qualify for a pilot's license under his assumed name, and it was a week before they could leave Stanruth. They made a slow, plodding progress, stopping off at a dozen planets for Worrel to convert his bank accounts into cash.

On New Miloma they traded their freighter and half a million credits for a sleek space yacht which Worrel renamed, privately, the *187*. On Calmus they waited several days while Worrel completed complicated arrangements to withdraw some money from banks across half the galaxy. They landed on Filline for still more financial transactions, and found the police waiting.

"Thomas Jefferson Sandler," the young captain said cheerfully. "The Galactic Bureau of Investigation has been wanting you badly for a long time."

"Sure," Sandler said. "How'd you locate me?"

"You made the mistake of qualifying—or I should say, requalifying—for a pilot's license. Your fingerprints went all the way to Earth, and eventually someone got around to making a few cross-checks. They were most pleasantly surprised. All of you are under arrest."

Worrel, caught in one of his rare moments of sobriety, turned on Sandler in panic. "Why'd you do it?" he hissed. "You didn't need a license. We could have



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sneaked off Stanruth and no one would have noticed."

"They always notice," Sandler said. "Then all three of us would have been fugitives. This way, it's only me." He turned to the captain. "Why bother these people? They didn't know who I was. They just hired a pilot."

"They'll have every opportunity to prove their innocence."

Sandler was flown out into the open country to a small, walled prison. He was treated with politeness and consideration. His cell was comfortable, his food excellent, and he was given fresh clothing. He shaved off his beard, and began to feel better.

Down through the months and years he had known this day would come. He felt almost relieved. Ahead of him lay only more futile quests, to Pronna, to other planets; and more futile interviews with officials who could not or would not talk; and more violence and more hiding. The drifting scum, the space-orphan, was better eliminated, put out of circulation.

An elderly, dignified lawyer called on him in the afternoon, and brought the welcome news that Worrel and Miriam had been released. Worrel had hired him. He went over the file of charges with Sandler, growing increasingly gloomy at each successive item, and finally he recommended that Sandler plead insanity.

"They'll hold you for psych-treatment if you bring it off," he said. "But that's better than death. The death penalty is still revived for special cases—about one a century, maybe—and I think they're going to make a special case out of you."

"Thanks," Sandler said dryly. "I'll think it over."

But his mind was firmly made up. There would be no insanity plea for Thomas Jefferson Sandler III. He wanted the entire sordid story of his career in crime brought out in open court. The government could eliminate Sandler, but it couldn't eliminate the sensational publicity that would attend a criminal trial.

If there was a trial. There was always the possibility of a conveniently arranged accident on the long trip back to Earth. And there wouldn't be a thing Sandler could do about that.

He went to bed, drifted off into a peaceful sleep, and was awakened in the dim hours of early morning by an urgent whisper.

"Sandler!"

He leaped to his feet. The cell door stood open, and Worrel was in the hallway, prodding a guard with a flame pistol.

"Quick!" Worrel hissed.

Barefooted, half dressed, Sand-



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ler took Worrel's pistol and hurried the guard on ahead of him. They found Miriam holding a pair of guards at pistol point near the entrance. With quick, deadly motions Sandler clubbed the guards into unconsciousness.

"Can we make the ship?" he demanded.

"We can try," Worrel said. "We've got an air car hidden outside."

"Let's go!"

They sprinted across the brightly-lighted yard to the prison gate. The gate stood ajar, and a dead guard was crumpled in the guardhouse, his face gruesome even in the shadows.

They moved through the gate and were running across the glaring patch of light that surrounded the walls when a guard saw them. A shout rang out, and a heavy flame rifle burned the air above their heads.

"It's in a clearing in the woods," Miriam gasped.

The flame rifle fired again, and missed. They were running in darkness, but Sandler knew they had only seconds before the rolling meadow would be lighted. The shadows of trees loomed far ahead of them. They stumbled across the slight depression of a water course, and Sandler guided them along it.

"It gives us some cover," he panted. "We'd better spread out. We're too good a target, running together. Miriam first. Now—Worrel."

They separated, running in single file along the water course.

"We'll be all right if we reach the trees," Sandler called.

The flame rifle snapped again, slicing between Sandler and Worrel. Sandler stopped, fired carefully, and heard a cry. He fired again, and shouts of alarm arose behind him. "Slowed them down," he thought, and ran on.

Lights glowed suddenly, bathing the meadow in naked brilliance. Beams from a dozen flame rifles crackled about them. Miriam's piercing scream cut across the night, and Sandler flung himself to the ground and methodically cut down the silhoueted pursuers. He moved on a moment later, and found Miriam bending over Worrel's prostrate figure.

"Go on," Worrel whispered urgently. "Don't worry about me. Go on!"

Without a word Sandler picked up the little musician, and led Miriam into the safety of the trees. He carried Worrel gently, ignoring the gushing blood and the gaping emptiness that had been his right side.

They reached the air car. Sandler carefully placed Worrel on a seat, and Miriam bent over him with tears in her eyes as Sandler took the controls.

"No good at this sort of thing," Worrel whispered. "Gun



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in my hand scares me stiff. See what my filthy money brings me? Sordid end of a sordid beginning. One less glob of scum on the troubled face of time."

"Don't talk," Miriam pleaded.

"You should have left me alone," Sandler said bitterly. "You two hadn't done anything wrong. You could have kept on looking. Now you'll be hunted like I was."

Worrel's words were pain-wracked sobs. "Needed you. Couldn't pull it off ourselves. I don't count, except for money. You two will make it."

Sandler brushed his hand across his wet eyes, and lied bravely. "Nonsense. You'll make it."

"Sordid end of a sordid beginning." Worrel lurched forward suddenly. "If you make it—if you find 187—take my ashes with you. Promise!"

"You'll make it right along with us," Sandler said.

"Promise!"

"Of course. But you'll make it."

Marty Worrel was dead when they reached the spaceport. They landed by their ship, and Sandler raced up the ramp with Worrel's dead body, wrenched open the sealed air lock, and hurried to the controls. Police cars were swarming down on the port, and they lifted just as officers and guards were fanning out to approach the ship.

Once in space, Sandler busied himself for hours with a complex, zig-zag course that would evade detection. Finally he relaxed, and turned to Miriam.

"Maybe they don't know you were involved in that mess," he said. "I can drop you off somewhere, and you can find a new identity for yourself. The longer you're with me, the less chance you'll have."

She shook her head. "Pronna," she said. "Marty would have wanted it that way."

"Yes," he said. "I suppose so." He took her hand and stroked it gently. She attracted him as no woman had ever attracted him, and yet . . .

"You're a brave woman," he said, and added quickly, to be quite safe, "sister."

She smiled wanly. "No. You're a brave man. Maybe a little reckless, but brave."

They slipped in on the night side of Pronna, and landed in a forest clearing. For an exorbitant fee a village mortician cremated Worrel's body, and asked no questions. Miriam found lodgings in the village, and Sandler turned most of Worrel's money over to her.

"If I don't come back," he said, "forget about the ship. Forget about 187. Forget about me.



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Go off to the other side of the galaxy, and make a new life for yourself."

"You'll come back," she said. "And I'll be waiting."

It took Sandler three days to make his way half-way around the planet to the capital city. It took him only twenty minutes, under the cover of darkness, to make his way into the sector commissioner's sprawling residence. His fiendish efficiency amused him. "Getting to be an expert at this sort of thing," he told himself grimly.

He cornered a frightened servant, got detailed information about the house, and left the servant in a closet, bound and gagged. In the commissioner's bedroom, he awoke the old man and blinded him with a light.

"I mean no harm to you, or anyone else," he said softly. "I want information."

"You pick an irregular way of going after it," the commissioner said testily. "Can we sit down and talk peacefully, or do you have to blind me?"

Sandler turned his light aside, locked the door, and flipped on the room lights. The commissioner stopped rubbing his eyes, and studied Sandler curiously. He was a small, wizened man with a grotesquely wrinkled face and a shining bald head, but there was lively alertness, almost humor, in his dark eyes.

"Thomas Jefferson Sandler," he chuckled. "I've been averaging one bulletin a month on you for years. I suppose I should have expected this." He got to his feet, and ceremoniously indicated a chair. "Please be seated. And put the gun away. I know you mean well, but I can't help thinking those things are known to go off accidently."

Sandler pocketed his pistol, sat down, and watched alertly while the commissioner slipped into a robe. He took the chair opposite Sandler, and smiled peacefully.

"You interest me, Thomas Jefferson Sandler. I'm happy you took the trouble to call on me."

"Planet 187," Sandler said. "What is it and where is it?"

The commissioner shook his head. "I don't know. I believe I can safely say that no one knows. Such records as were kept were all in the files of the Ministry of Public Welfare on Earth, and my confidential information is that they were destroyed years ago."

"I've heard so many lies," Sandler said wearily. "How do I know you're telling the truth?"

Commissioner Novin held up his hand. "No truth serum, please. On my word as a sector commissioner, and a galactic citizen, and a fellow human being, that is the truth."

"I've had enough violence, so



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I'll have to believe you. I thank you, and I apologize for disturbing you." He got to his feet.

"Oh, don't go," the commissioner exclaimed. "I don't know anything about planet 187, but I might be able to help you. As I said, you interest me. By profession I'm a psychologist, and I've been following your career carefully, and the problem of what you probably call space-orphans. I have my ways of finding out things, and I know somewhat more about the matter than the authorities on Earth realize—especially since my position out here places me much closer to the problem. Now—sit down, please, and I'll tell you what I know."

Suspecting a trap, hand clutching the pistol in his pocket, Sandler sat down.

"I believe some background information is in order," Commissioner Novin said. "Among us humans, fads are peculiar things. Sometimes they are mildly eccentric, and sometimes they reach the point of absolute mania. At present, for example, large families are something of a fad among the wealthy. One of the measures of a man's success in life is the number of children he has. It is also a measure of a woman's adequacy as a wife. The fad is a mild one, treated somewhat humorously but nevertheless sincerely. Perhaps you've encountered it yourself."

"I can't say that I have," Sandler said, shifting his feet impatiently.

"I consider this fad to be a direct reaction to a fad of roughly twenty to forty years ago in which women considered it a very real stigma to bear even one child. That fad did reach the point of mania, and resulted in a craze for adopted children. Fortunately for the human race, it was a passing thing, and it never touched the lower classes at all. It was not even pursued by a majority of the upper classes, but only by a small, closely knit, socially select group that centered in the Earth sector. The unfortunate consequences resulted from the fact that this group had financial and political influence all out of proportion to its numbers."

"The craze for adopted child quickly exhausted the supply, and political pressures resulted. The Ministry of Public Welfare set up a special department, and began to search the galaxy for children available for adoption. And it encountered a stubborn obstacle. The well-organized, civilized planets had their own laws concerning such children, and they flatly refused to have the Ministry of Public Welfare meddling with them. The situation grew more critical, and political



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pressure became enormous. And finally a solution was found. Do you mind if I smoke?"

Leaning forward intently, Sandler shook his head. The commissioner produced a bulging cigar from the pocket of his gown, lit it, and waved it carelessly.

"The solution," he said, "was simple. The Federation is constantly expanding, and constantly discovering new, inhabited planets. The people of many of those planets have at best a primitive civilization. A good number of them are no more than savages. We don't need to go into the conflicting migration and evolution theories which try to account for the presence of humans on these newly discovered planets. The point is, humans are constantly being found, living under primitive conditions, perhaps, but still human. Where there were no obvious difficulties, such as distinctive racial characteristics or an apparent low level of intelligence, children from these planets were simply—taken."

"Stolen?" Sandler gasped.

"Stolen, if you want to put it that way. Appropriated, the government would say, as if it had a legal right to such action. The children were transported to Earth, educated to the normal level of a civilized child of their age, and distributed to the adoption-crazed wealthy."

"Inhuman!" Sandler muttered.

"Decidedly," the commissioner agreed. "I was, for a time, local administrator on one of those planets, and one day a converted battle cruiser dropped down on us, with a skeleton detachment of pediatricians and nurses and orders from highest authority. They processed the native children carefully, picked out a shipload, and left." He pointed his cigar at Sandler. "They did it kindly, I suppose, but never as long as I live will I forget the plight of those unfortunate parents. Ships dropped in periodically as long as I remained on that planet."

"Inhuman," Sandler muttered again.

"Governments frequently tend to become inhuman. So do laws. The Federation Government is a huge, complicated, impersonal thing. Supposing a need for a certain metal develops. The government locates an uncivilized planet which has the metal, and literally strips it. Later, when that planet develops its own need for the metal, its supply is exhausted. There is an ancient name for such action. It is called colonial exploitation. Stripping a helpless planet of its natural resources. It was done all the time, and it's still being done."



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He blew a cloud of smoke in the general direction of the ceiling, and said, looking intently at Sandler, "In the eyes of the government, those children were just another natural resource, there for the taking."

Sandler spoke deliberately, controlling his anger. "Up until now I've regretted the murders I've had to commit. But no longer."

"Ah! But those you murdered were in no way responsible for the—crime. The craze for adopted children waned long ago, and eventually the government officials began to foresee unfortunate long-range consequences. The practice of exploitation was stopped. But there were some terrible results. The native parents, after being deprived of one child after another, stopped having children. And today, some of those planets are almost depopulated."

A violent pounding shook the door, and Sandler leaped to his feet. The commissioner shouted at an hysterically babbling servant, "All right. Go to bed, and forget about it. I'll tell the police myself, in the morning."

Sandler took a deep breath, and resumed his seat. "That still doesn't explain all the secrecy over this."

"Politics," the commissioner said. "Sordid politics. The Expansionist Party has been in power for over a hundred and seventy-five years. It intends to remain in power that much longer—indefinitely, in fact. Its margin has always been comfortable, but never overwhelming, and now some of these exploited planets are approaching the point where they must be given full membership in the Federation. The Expansionist Party must admit them, because to refuse would be to abandon its own principles. It would certainly lead to defeat. On the other hand, if all the details of that miserable exploitation were exposed, the opposition would certainly control those new planets, and a good many of the old planets would turn against the Expansionists, if only on humanitarian principles. A party in power for a hundred and seventy-five years becomes firmly entrenched. It develops ways of silencing criticism. It permits opposition, of course—it has to. But only up to a point. Beyond that point, it would quickly ruin anyone opposing it. So the adoption scandal has been kept quiet, and the Expansionists will go to any extreme to keep it that way."

"Even murder," Sandler said. "You may not believe it, but my life of crime started back on Earth, when the government tried to have me murdered."

"Not the government. The Ex-



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pansionist Party. What you were doing couldn't have harmed the government."

"I'm grateful for your information. I understand a lot of things, now. But it doesn't help me find planet 187."

"This might," the commissioner said. "The Expansionist Party has already been defeated. It doesn't realize it, yet, but the next election, or the one after that, will bring us a new government. A number of those exploited planets are in my sector, and during the last few years—in fact, ever since that odd *Homing Song* went around the galaxy—space-orphans have been coming home by the thousands. They've dropped everything, wherever they were, and come home. Some even left wives or husbands, and children."

"How do they know?" Sandler exclaimed.

"As a psychologist, I find that question intriguing. How *do* they know? I've talked with many of them, and they did not even go so far as to discover their source number. They simply—came. On the other hand, others, such as you, have searched widely about the galaxy, and have no idea where their home planet is. Can you account for that?"

Sandler shook his head.

The commissioner discarded his cigar, and lit another. "I have a theory," he said. "I give it to you for what it's worth, and wish you luck. It is a well-known fact that many animals have a kind of homing instinct. So do many primitive peoples. Few civilized peoples have such an instinct. The space-orphans are not far removed from savagery, and evidently they retain that instinct. With sufficient motivation, and the song gave them that motivation, they got themselves ships, and said, in effect, let's go that way, and went home."

"Across space?" Sandler said incredulously. "That's impossible!"

"Of course. Any intelligent, civilized man realizes that. But the fact remains that they've been coming by thousands. Tens of thousands."

"I can't believe it."

"No. That's why you interest me. Lose a primitive human, and his instinct takes him home. Lose a civilized man, and he looks around for a map or a chart. You're a trained pilot and navigator, and naturally you know too much about space travel to rely on instinct. You consult a star chart, and you make complicated mathematical computations, and you know they will take you where you want to go. But if you can't find your destination on a chart, if



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your objective is some vague entity like 'home,' you're completely frustrated. Your homing instinct has been civilized out of you."

Sandler sat thinking about Marty Worrel. Worrel, the wanderer. Sandler, the wanderer. If the theory were even remotely correct, the wanderers had carried their defeat within them. Worrel's foster father had been a space line executive, and Marty had been traveling almost since he was adopted. He'd even had rudimentary training in stellar navigation. Like Sandler, he'd been civilized.

But there was Miriam. Would she have found her way home if she hadn't burdened herself with Worrel and Sandler?

Sandler got up wearily, feeling the crushing burden of wasted years and wasted lives. "I'm grateful," he said. "If once, back there on Earth, someone had been decent enough . . ."

The commissioner held up his hand. "I know you're no criminal. And as I said, I saw it happen, on one planet. I'll never forget it."

"If I'm able, I'll test your theory."

"I hope you do. I'd like to know how you make out."

"If it's possible, I'll get word to you."

The commissioner ushered Sandler through the silent house, and stopped once to open a safe, and stuff a bundle of currency into his hand. "It's insured," he said. "And it might be best if the police think a common thief was here tonight. I'll give you a couple of hours before I call them."

Solemnly Sandler shook the commissioner's hand.

Three days later, and a night, Sandler and Miriam shot spaceward under the cover of darkness. In deep space, Sandler turned to Miriam. "It's up to you, now," he said.

She smiled sadly. "I've known all along. But I was afraid to trust myself. It's that way."

### VII.

SANDLER set the ship down into the dawn, into the blue sky that was not blue, into the radiant pink of the promising new day. The planet was called Analon on their charts. They walked down the ramp and stood looking about tremulously, and a ground car bounced towards them from the terminal building. A man Sandler's age leaped out, strode towards them, studied their faces. Suddenly he smiled.

"Welcome home," he said.

Other cars left the terminal building, and started towards them. "Why did you land here?" the stranger said. "Most of us are putting down in out-of-the-



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way places. Doesn't do to have this oaf of an administrator know too much. I suppose it doesn't matter now, though."

"Then there are—others?" Sandler asked.

"Enough to scare this administrator, if he found out the truth. Over a hundred thousand, to date, and they're still coming. Do you two remember anything? Family names? Places?"

Sandler shook his head, and Miriam said quickly, "My mother's name was Lilga."

"A common name, but we'll do some checking."

The other cars drew up, and stopped, and their occupants sat waiting. He chuckled softly. "I have a kind of semi-official position, of which the administrator does not approve. I'm head of a settlers' committee, which gives me the right to an exclusive interview before they haul you off for the formalities. Krig is the name, incidentally. We're all going back to our original names, if we can find out what they were. And you'll have to learn to speak Analonian, though the old language is already pepped up to the point where you wouldn't recognize it if you remembered it."

He took their names, descriptions, educational training and occupations. He inquired about any identification marks that might have survived from childhood. He carefully spoke the names of promient places on Analon, to see if they recognized any.

"We'll go into this more thoroughly, later," he said. "We'll do our best to locate your parents, if they're still alive, and help you get together with any brothers or sisters who've returned. The Federation—" he spat out the word angrily "—took all the children in a certain age range. All of them. We guess at least a quarter of a million children were stolen from Analon. And then the Federation pulled out abruptly. Didn't even bother to leave medical or observation teams, but it did leave a lot of alien bacteria, and the population was nearly wiped out. We have a few scores to settle with the Federation. Any day, now, we're going to throw out the administrator and run this planet ourselves."

Krig stepped back, and nodded at the waiting officials. "These two have the committee's approval," he called.

A young officer walked towards them, waving a folder. "These people aren't settlers," he said.

Krig looked at him coldly. "Of course they're settlers."

"No. They're going back to Earth and settle down to a nice, multiple prison sentence. Or worse. Glad you dropped in here,



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Thomas Jefferson Sandler. This means a promotion for me. Consider yourself under arrest. I've already notified Sector Headquarters to send a ship for you."

"What'd he do?" Krig said.

"Both of them. The girl is an accomplice, at least. Here—read it yourself. There's six pages."

Krig leafed through the folder, and stepped close to Sandler. "Did you really do all this?"

"I wanted to come home," Sandler said bitterly. "They tried to stop me."

Sympathy touched Krig's face. "We need people like you," he said softly. "It's time we started running this planet our own way. We'll have you out by midnight."

The officer tucked the file under his arm, and jerked his thumb towards a ground car. Soldiers closed in on them. Sandler fumbled in his pocket, brought out a small plastic container, and broke the seal. He tossed the contents to the wind.

"Welcome home, Marty," he said.

On a distant planet, the commissioner of Sector 1389 was jerked out of a pleasantly sound sleep by the urgently sounding gong of his visiphone. Sleepily, he stumbled towards it, listened for a few seconds to the incoherent babbling of a subclerk, and screamed, "Idiot!"

He cut off and returned to his bed, muttering angrily to himself. "Revolution indeed! Any fool knows that the native population on Analon is practically extinct."

**THE END**


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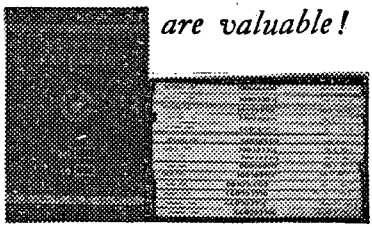

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**This is the last in a series of articles by Sam Moskowitz, quasi-official historian of fantasy and science-fiction, which analyze the achievements and contributions of outstanding names in the field.**

# PHILIP WYLIE:

## The Saccharine Cynic

IN MARCH, 1930, the Book League Monthly, a forerunner of the Book-of-the-Month Club, offered its readership a selection filled wtih some of the most startling situations yet imagined: a man who could lift weights of four tons with ease, leap such distances that he almost seemed to fly, shed machine-gun bullets as a bridegroom sheds rice, rip bank vaults apart as though they were papier-mache or break a charging bull's neck with a side-handed cuff. The book was *Gladiator* by Philip Wylie. Most people probably recognize the character: Superman, of course—the original.

A few years later, a struggling Cleveland cartoonist, Joe Schuster, and his fledgling author associate, Jerome Siegel, would borrow the central theme from *Gladiator*, even paraphrase some of the dialogue, to create one of the most fabulously popular cartoon adventure strips of our time and no one would dream the idea had once formed the basis of a serious novel.

Chronologically, *Gladiator* was the third book by Philip Wylie, preceded by two novels of manners, *Heavy Laden* (1928) and *Babes and Sucklings* (1929). In point of fact, it was the first novel he wrote and when it was accepted by Alfred A. Knopf the publisher agreed to hold it back for a few years until Wylie es-



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tablished a reputation with more general works of fiction.

There have been many types of supermen in fiction, but if we rule out Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan on the basis that it is theoretically within the realm of possibility that a properly selected, trained and reared human being could attain comparable strength, agility and ferocity, then *Gladiator* is probably the greatest story of a *physical* superman since *Samson and Delilah.*

A veritable Casper Milquetoast of a professor, Abednego Danner, injects his domineering wife, newly pregnant, with a chemical while she is under the effects of an opiate. The effect on the embryo is to form a child with superhuman strength. The mother realizes she has a problem on her hands, when the tiny baby displays phenomenal strength, easily smashing his crib to smithereens with a careless gesture of the hand.

The neighbors are shocked by the metal cage built for the child and gossip concerning the abnormality of the youthful Hugo Danner becomes the topic of the college town.

The painstaking care with which the Danners train their child to hide his strength and the psychological impact upon Hugo of his growing awareness of "differentness" is superbly delineated by the author.

A star football player, the boy leaves home and school after accidentally killing a member of the other team. He seeks to find a place for himself and his Herculean strength in the world, at one time or another trying prize fighting, strong-man acts, pearl fishing, soldiering, iron work, farming and banking, but each career is terminated by the inability of associates to accept his unparalleled physical power. The willing suspension of disbelief on this score is strengthened by Wylie's investing Hugo Danner with only normal intelligence.

The author's purpose is simple and brutally direct—to expose the plight of a truly superior man in a world of ordinary people. As Wylie was to say years later in his internationally famous *Generation of Vipers:* "For if ever there does appear upon this planet a tightly knit minority of really superior people, it will be the end of all the rest of mankind—and mankind knows it, not having come through a billion-odd years of evolutionary struggle for nothing."

When finally, a professor who understands and befriends Danner suggests the creation of a superhuman race in the wilderness, Hugo Danner, unable to resolve his doubts, lifts his eyes



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to the heavens and pleads for a sign. A bolt of lightning strikes him dead.

The major flaw in the book is its unconvincing ending, but excepting that, it is a rewarding, carefully written work that clearly heralded an extraordinary new talent on the science fiction scene.

*Gladiator* was brought to the attention of science fiction devotees by C. A. Brandt, one of the leading authorities of that period in a major 1,000-word review in the June, 1930, issue of AMAZING STORIES, the leading magazine in the field. "In spite of the obvious shortcomings of this book," Brandt concluded, alluding to its finale, "it is quite enjoyable and will not be forgotten as quickly as the average 'bestseller'."

The science fiction world was to see much more of Philip Gordon Wylie. Born May 12, 1902, son of a Methodist minister, Philip Wylie made a case for the transmission of literary aptitude genetically when he stated: "I am the son of a minister of considerable eloquence and of a mother who wrote novels for magazines, the brother of a novelist, teacher and essayist, and the half-brother of as vivid a writer as death ever choked into premature silence—so I have always lived in the midst of language." Philip Wylie's mother died while he was still a child and his father raised him. Fascinated by science, he practically memorized the children's *Book of Knowledge* by the age of 12. He stole books on explosives from the library of the swank New Jersey suburb of Montclair and successfully manufactured explosives and fireworks, withal managing to keep from blowing his head off.

Jules Verne and H. G. Wells raised his interest in science to a fever so that in high school he favored mathematics and physics. Nevertheless, the discovery of James Joyce and other literary experimentalists of the early part of the century, as well as poetic aspirations, altered his interests sufficiently so that he registered at Princeton with the idea of majoring in English. His application was made too late and, in desperation, he pleaded with the Dean to make an exception in his case.

The Dean agreed on condition that he be permitted to lay out Wylie's curriculum. The Dean was partial to science, and Wylie found himself burdened with all the higher mathematics, physics, geology, evolution and biology he could handle. He heroically completed three years, then in 1923 threw in the sponge, for reasons personal more than academic.



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Out of college, young Wylie steered back in the direction of a literary career, becoming a member of the staff of THE NEW YORKER in 1925. His interest in science fiction had not terminated with Verne and Wells and he read Edgar Rice Burroughs until the Mars series convinced him that he knew infinitely more science than John Carter's creator. When the world's first science fiction magazine, AMAZING STORIES, published by Hugo Gernsback, appeared in 1926, it could boast Philip Wylie as a charter reader.

The influence of AMAZING STORIES was apparent in the method used by Philip Wylie in developing his philosophical concept of the outsiderness of the exceptional man in *Gladiator*. Its acceptance by Knopf in 1927 probably contributed to the shortness of his stint as advertising manager of the Cosmopolitan Book Corp. which occupied him during portions of 1927 and 1928. During this period, Cosmopolitan published S. Fowler Wright's classic bestseller, *Deluge*, a tale of planetary flood and disaster that was made into a motion picture by RKO in 1933. Elements in certain world catastrophe sequences in *Deluge* seem to echo in Wylie's later *When World's Collide*, particularly man's reversion to unreasoning savagery; a quick peeling away of the veneer of civilization.

One year after the publication of Gladiator, Farrar and Rinehart issued another science fiction novel by Philip Wylie, *The Murderer Invisible*, dealing with a man who discovers the secret of invisibility and seeks to first terrorize and then rule the world. There are dramatic scenes of destruction and chaos in Washington, D. C., and New York, but the scientist is eventually betrayed by a girl he thought loved him.

This novel clearly reveals the patronage of H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, through an identical method of achieving invisibility by attaining ultimate transparency of all body bone and tissue after neutralizing color and pigment.

Universal Studios had purchased *The Invisible Man* for screening at the time *The Murderer Invisible* appeared. Wylie's more sensational development of the theme attracted their attention. They bought movie rights to Wylie's book and the picture, *The Invisible Man*, which appeared in 1933 owed as much to Wylie as to Wells in the final form.

As a novel, though fast paced and occasionally memorable, *The Murderer Invisible* was too melodramatic and derivative to make a serious impact.



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Just previous to this, Philip Wylie had made his first contact with Hollywood on the recommendation of the editor of THE SATURDAY EVENING POST. Paramount had purchased *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by H. G. Wells and was looking for a man to adapt it to the screen. They had great misgivings as to the plausibility of the fantastic concept of surgically transforming animals into humans, but took heart when inveterate Wells fan and science fiction lover Philip Wylie assured them that the biological aspects of the story were sound. They hired him to do the script for what developed to be a screen horror masterpiece which appeared as *The Island of Lost Souls* in 1932 and was the vehicle by which George Laughton was introduced to the American audience.

Philip Wylie's adventure novel, *The Savage Gentleman*, appeared from Farrar and Rinehart in 1932 while he was employed full-time in Hollywood. It dealt with the results of a social experiment, conducted by the owner of a chain of eleven American newspapers, who takes his infant son and a few trusted aides to an uncharted island in the Pacific after an unfortunate and embittering marriage. It is his intention to raise his son away from the corrupting influences of civilization.

The island has the crumbling remains of an ancient civilization as well as types of zebu-oxen and giant lemurs that evolution forgot. After 33 years on the island, during which time the baby has become a physical giant capable of killing sharks with a hunting knife for sport and the equivalent of a Doctor of Philosophy through the training of his father, the small group is rescued from the island by a Scandinavian freighter.

His father has died of a heart attack, but the son, Henry Stone, returns to civilization to find himself heir to an estate that has grown to twenty-two newspapers and eleven banks. He rescues his newspapers from corrupt leadership, learns about women and evolves a philosophical defense against the base aspects of much of the world in an adroitly told tale whose distillation from the Edgar Rice Burroughs formula would have been obvious without the author's giving it away in the greeting of Henry Stone by the lawyer of his estate: "Stone! Good God, young man, what a surprise! And what a story!" He smiled ruefully, then. "And how we've mishandled it. We've made the young scion of our founder into a *Tarzan*, without any real information about him at all."

Much more significant are the



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lines in the book delivered by Henry Stone's father: "I've told him McCobb—all about women. About women as mothers. And I've recounted their sins. Their shortcomings. Their lack of imagination and their superficiality. I've tried to educate him —prejudice him, perhaps—without lying. He understands.'" It was only 1932, a full ten years before *Generation of Vipers* would explode "Momism" on the unsuspecting public with the intensity of a hydrogen bomb, but few would remember how long it had been in gestation. Not even Philip Wylie seemed aware of the year the concept had cropped up in his work when he attributed its inclusion in *Generation of Vipers*, during a live television interview with Mike Wallace on "Night Beat" in 1957, to a remark by Hervey Allan, novelist, concerning a division of soldiers that had spelled out "Mom" on the drill field.

And as far as women in mass were concerned, Philip Wylie has the elder Stone leave as a legacy to his son the advice: "Never, never, never believe a woman . . . Women are ruin. Love is a myth. Marry when you are over forty-five and marry someone you do not love. Love is ruin."

But *Generation of Vipers* was still a long way off and Hollywood, oblivious of "Momism" but quite aware of the popularity of Tarzan, chortled with glee at the thought that they had a screenwriter who could create a counterpart of Borroughs' apeman. Philip Wylie brought into being the Lion Man as the lead character in a jungle thriller, *The King of the Jungle*, a Paramount release in 1933 that was to parade the marvelous physique of champion swimmer Buster Crabbe across the silver screen in his initial role.

*The Island of Lost Souls* had proved good box office, so Philip Wylie was given another try at a horror script which the public viewed as *Murders in the Zoo*, starring Lionel Atwill, also in 1933.

But Wylie had no intention of being typed. True, during this period he was fully as handsome as many of the movie stars, a superb swimmer with a fine physique (augmented by a bit of weight lifting) and with a cultivated manner contradicting the savagery of his rhetoric. Good money and good living did not diminish his interest in science. Learning the filmmakers were wracking their brains on who to get as a consultant for the little-known science of radioactivity around which a picture on the life of Mme. Curie, co-discoverer of radium was being shot, the ubiquitous Philip Wylie assured them he knew just the man. He



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borrowed the script and headed for the California Institute of Technology. There he talked to Robert A. Millikan, who had won the Nobel prize in 1923 for the isolation of the electron and the measurement of its charge and was at that very moment still shining up the Roosevelt Association Medal awarded him in 1932 for his research in cosmic rays.

Turning the script over to a few of his associate physicists, Millikan took Philip Wylie on a guided tour around the Norman Bridges Laboratory, where, even then, crackling cyclotrons were contributing to man's forthcoming harnessing of the atom.

Wylie was entranced and during the remainder of his period in Hollywood spent more time at the Norman Bridges Laboratory than on the set. His scientific background at Princeton gave him an easy grasp of the subject and the information he absorbed from the leading theoreticians and experimenters at the Laboratory proved a more advanced course in physics than could have been obtained in the university classrooms.

So enthusiastic and convincing did Philip Wylie become as to the wonders of future science that the studio heads decided to proceed on a serious film to be titled *Fifty Years From Now* and assigned Philip Wylie to tour the country with Milton Mackaye visiting top scientists and experimental laboratories, to assemble authentic information suitable for the production. A marvelous portfolio was assembled and the picture on the world of 1983 was ready to go into production when the paths of H. G. Wells and Philip Wylie crossed again. Out of England came news that Alexander Korda had purchased H. G. Wells' *The Shape of Things to Come* on a similar forecast of the future. This finally appeared as *Things to Come*, starring Raymond Massey and Cedric Hardwicke in 1935 and plans for *Fifty Years From Now* were permanently shelved.

Despite his rigid Hollywood schedule, Wylie, a speedy and prolific writer, never ceased his book and magazine output. He had been a contributor to RED BOOK magazine and had collaborated with its editor, Edwin Balmer, on a non-fantasy novel, *5 Fatal Words*. Donald Kennicott, editor of RED BOOK's companion magazine, BLUE BOOK, characterized Balmer as "a wizard in ideas, plot and suspenseful situation, but rather left-handed in the detail of writing. As a result, a great deal of his work was done in collaboration—for a long time with his brother-in law William Mac-



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Harg, and later with Phil Wylie and others."

Balmer, in collaboration with MacHarg, received considerable notoriety by forecasting the lie detector. In the most accurate scientific detail, they had predicted not only the method that was eventually used, but a half-dozen other approaches which might have proved equally effective, in a series of short stories published in book form in 1910 as *The Achievements of Luther Trant*, by Small Maynard in Boston. Most of the collection was reprinted by Hugo Gernsback in his science fiction magazines, AMAZING STORIES and SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY in the late twenties and early thirties. Edwin Balmer also had a science fiction novel, *The Flying Death*, to his credit.

A bug on astronomy, Balmer had roughed out a sequence of events for a novel where two planets enter our solar system from outer space. One will strike the earth with resultant mutual destruction. The only chance man has for survival is to build space ships and transfer a few thousand men and women to the second invading world—which will take up an orbit around the sun —before it moves out of range. He presented this idea to Wylie and found a kindred spirit. Like a child with a new toy, Philip Wylie assembled his physicist friends at Cal Tech and mathematically mapped out the scientific elements by which this feat of special leap frog could be accomplished. The time lost in the advancement of atomics was unquestionably science fiction's gain.

The collaboration, written as *These Shall Not Die*, was retitled *When Worlds Collide* by Donald Kennicott and opened in the September, 1932 issue of BLUE BOOK.

In 1932 there were not enough science fiction magazines to assuage the literary hunger of its thousands of more avid followers. Along with Munsey's ARGOSY, BLUE BOOK catered heavily to this group, obtaining first magazine publication of the majority of Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels. *Tarzan and the Leopard Men* ran almost concurrently with *When Worlds Collide*. This, together with a price reduction to 15 cents effective with that issue, gave Balmer and Wylie's effort exposure to a leadership swollen with recruits from the science fiction magazines.

"In this issue," Donald Kennicott told them, "appears one of the most remarkable novels any magazine has printed in years—'When Worlds Collide,' the collaboration of two of America's best writers . . . you have a real novelty awaiting you . . ."

The collaboration proved a



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sensation. There had been tales of cosmic disaster before and on a grand scale, but never one told with such scientific versimilitude, literary facility and focus on the individual.

The dialogue was as slick as the best magazines, the tension mounted with every chapter, yet the author's sincerity was never in question.

When Frederick A. Stokes Co. enshrined the novel in cloth covers, reviewer C. A. Brandt, who also worked as first reader of AMAZING STORIES, gave it an entire page in the October 1933 issue of that magazine, leading off with: "*When Worlds Collide* is easily worth twenty times that amount ($2.00) and all lovers of science fiction are urged to read it.

"If it had been my duty to read the manuscript and comment on it, I would have called it 'super-excellent,' and I am glad to say that I seldom read anything as well done as this particular book.

"It is an astronomical fantasy of the first magnitude, exceedingly well written."

His enthusiasm was echoed by the readers. Already, the unique phenomena of fan magazines devoted to science fiction had come into being, and one of the earliest and most famous of these, THE TIME TRAVELER, polled its readers for the best magazine science fiction novel of 1932. The winner was overwhelmingly *When Worlds Collide* and was so announced in their Winter, 1933 issue.

Any victory is only relative to the caliber of the competion and, by the standards of the science fiction fans of 1932, it was formidable. ARGOSY had run in the past year A. Merritt's *Dwellers in the Mirage*, considered a candidate for his best novel; Edgar Rice Burroughs, who perennially outsold the Bible, had started a new interplanetary series with *Pirates of Venus*, and Austin Hall, after more than a decade of reader pressure, had finally written *The Spot of Light*, sequel to the almost legendary *Blind Spot*, which he had co-authored with Homer Eon Flint. WEIRD TALES ran *Buccaneers of Venus* by popular Burroughs imitator Otis Adelbert Kline, while renowned mathematician Eric Temple Bell, writing under the nom de plume of John Taine, offered *The Time Stream* in WONDER STORIES.

If there is any conclusion to be drawn, it is the evident fact that all the above stories belonged to the old scientific romance school which were long on escape and adventure and short on science. Wylie displayed that good science was not incompatible with gripping writing and thrill-



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ing situations, and his use of atomic energy for motive power proved impressively prophetic.

The science fiction fans were not the only ones impressed. Paramount bought *When Worlds Collide* (keeping it on the shelf until 1951) and the novel, with the original illustrations from BLUE BOOK was syndicated to the newspapers.

With such popularity, a sequel was a foregone conclusion and *After Worlds Collide* began serialization in BLUE BOOK for November, 1933. The first novel had ended with the landing on the new world, the discovery that the air was breathable and that there were evidences of alien civilization. In the sequel, the reader is led on a marvelous tour of discovery involving a chain of connected, automatically-functioning cities but with no sign of life, though paintings reveal that the original inhabitants were human-like in appearance.

Ships from several other nations have successfully escaped from Earth and their passengers have occupied another city. A grim conflict in an otherworldly setting develops between an Asiatic-held city and the Americans. Ultimately the Americans are victorious, but the prime mystery remains: What happened to the builders of the cities?

Reader reaction to *After Worlds Collide* duplicated that for the original story. When Stokes announced it for book form, a second printing was necessitated *before* publication. If this does not seem impressive, it should be remembered that the nation was in the throes of the most paralyzing depression in its history and $2.00 books were definitely high up on the list of luxuries.

The science fiction world's leading critic, C. A. Brandt, found that he had exhausted his superlatives previously and in the July, 1934 AMAZING STORIES wrote: "As I pointed out in my review published in our October, 1933, issue, I would have labeled *When Worlds Collide* 'super-excellent' and if *After Worlds Collide* had been written as a first book and not as a sequel, I would likewise have been compelled to call it not only good, but excellent."

There seemed no question that a third book in the series, solving the riddle of the new planet's missing inhabitants was the next logical step, and indeed a plot was outlined by Balmer but vetoed by Wylie. Every word of *When Worlds Collide* had been written by Wylie and it had been published as written. Similarly, Wylie wrote all of the text of the sequel, but before press time Balmer made some alterations that affected scientific plausibil-



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ity. Wylie, a purist at science fiction nurtured in the tradition of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Hugo Gernsback, was disturbed by these changes. Balmer's plot outline of the third book would have been difficult to validate on the basis of known facts. Wylie contended that the success of the first two volumes was predicated, to a large extent, upon the high degree of respect shown for scientific accuracy. Therefore, though he continued to collaborate with Balmer on adventure and detective novels, he refused to give literary substance to the projected third in the *When Worlds Collide* series.

Up until the publication of *Generation of Vipers*, in 1942, *When Worlds Collide* was probably the best selling of all Wylie's books, going through dozens of printings, in standard editions as well as the low-priced Triangle printing, an Armed Services Edition, foreign editions and eventually pocket book printings. With *After Worlds Collide*, the two novels were collected into one volume in 1950 by Lippincott and both have never been out of print in hard covers since their first publication.

Then, very shortly after the writing of *After Worlds Collide*, a strange thing happened. Philip Wylie sat down and began to write a novel for Philip Wylie. He had once wanted to be a poet, so there was some poetry in it. He needed to get James Joyce out of his system, so sentences started without capitals, whole pages were devoted to single words and pointing fingers separated paragraphs. He was a slick-paper magazine specialist and a veteran at script dialogue and it showed. He had written other novels of manners and now he placed the emphasis on morals—lack of them. He made Philip Wylie one of the characters in the book and spelled his name right. He wrote experimentally, stream-of-consciousness, flashbacks and seasoned it with lots of sex.

Despite this melange, the clarity and honesty of style so characteristic of him made the book read easily and well. He called it *Finnley Wren* and overnight they talked about him as an important mainstream writer. There was almost everything of Wylie in the book but science fiction. He corrected that by having one of his characters sit down and read two short stories, unrelated to the novel but incorporated complete in the text. One he called *An Epistle to the Thessalonians* and the other *Epistle to the Galatians*.

The former had the distinction of being Wylie's only fictional inclusion in a science



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fiction magazine, running in the December, 1950, issue of WORLDS BEYOND. It is a brilliantly written satire involving a giant, a thousand miles in height, that appears from space, kicks the city of New York off the map, and departs as enigmatically as he arrived. The second *Epistle* is a brief but devastating vignette aimed at racism (which may have been the inspiration of Herbert Read's *The Green Child,* 1935), wherein a scientist discovers a drug which is a lifelong preventative for all known diseases at a cost of three-tenths of a cent per person, but no one will take it because it turns the user green!

Philip Wylie returned to Hollywood for two years with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer beginning in 1937. His first novel, *Gladiator,* was released as a motion picture by Columbia in 1938. They turned it into a rather pointless comedy starring mammoth-mouthed Joe E. Brown, but even Brown wasn't too happy about the entire thing, since he developed a double hernia wrestling Man Mountain Dean in one of the film's sequences.

The literary world, like a fighter watching an opponent's highly-touted right, waited for a repetition of *Finnley Wren,* to suddenly find itself stunned on the canvas from a rhetorical left hook in the form of *Generation of Vipers* from Rinehart in 1942.

"For many years—indeed, for all of my adult life—I have yearned far more to contribute to thought than to mere entertainment," Wylie said in the preface to that book. "And, while I have watched a score of men whom I considered to be the veriest charlatans attain a high degree of reputation as thinkers, my own thoughts have been almost uniformly relegated to the doghouse . . . The urge in me to do that was unquenchable. No calumny, no ribald denunciation —not even, I have found, the burning of my books in my own country—can arrest my ambition to become that figure of more than well-paid authorship: a wise guy. That is *my* vanity."

With a style of writing which in beauty of phrasing, clearness of meaning and boundless inventiveness now owed more to his own talent than anyone's influence, Wylie excoriated the transgressions and lapses of his countrymen, sparing neither church, school, medicine, economics, morals, statesmen, educators, businessmen, military men or mothers. The last, codified under the now-generic term of "Momism," caused the greatest reaction since mothers had previously been sacrosanct when it came to social criticism.

Christ struck no harder psy-



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chological blows when he drove the moneylenders from the Temple than Wylie in *Generation of Vipers*. Though some of the more direct targets yowled in dismay, and though Wylie would now be permanently stigmatized as a woman hater, the readers, with more discernment than they had been given credit for, saw that there was no meanness, viciousness or selfish purpose behind the author's indignation and took him to their hearts.

When *Night Unto Night* was issued in 1944, it made the best-seller list as a work of fiction. Almost in a mystical vein, touching upon life beyond our own and offering comfort and guidance to those who might have lost a loved one in the war, it represented a renunciation of the concept of the death wish. It was entirely Wylie, however, with inserted essays on morals, diatribes against inanities and one complete science fiction story out of context titled *The Snibbs Phenomenon*, dealing with a group of Martians who gradually fitted themselves, undetected, into the pattern of the world's life during the war years, and an uncompleted fantasy, *The Cyfer Phenomenon*, concerning a man who awoke one morning to find that one of his legs was gone and the one in its place didn't belong to him.

Early in 1945, Philip Wylie wrote on order for the AMERICAN MAGAZINE, a long novelette entitled *The Paradise Crater*. The story was set in 1965, and though World War II had not yet ended, presupposed the Nazis had been defeated. A band of diehard Nazis with headquarters in Wyoming were planning to conquer the United States through the utilization of a deadly new weapon. AMERICAN MAGAZINE rejected the story as too fantastic, particularly the weapon—an atom bomb made from Uranium 237!

Harold Ober, Wylie's agent, sent the story to BLUE BOOK. While science fiction magazines were exempt, other publications were required to censor any material they felt might involve national security. Donald Kennicott decided to play safe and sent the story to Washington, D. C., for approval.

Security suggested that they would be a lot happier if BLUE BOOK didn't publish the story. Unaware of the storm he had raised, Kennicott returned the manuscript to a thoroughly frightened Ober, who had already been contacted by Central Intelligence. Special agents were on their way to deal with Wylie, who had been placed under house arrest in a Westbury, Connecticut, hotel.

At the hotel, Wylie was made



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to undergo a traumatic experience. A Major from Army Intelligence arrived with the dogmatic announcement that he was prepared to take Wylie's life if necessary to prevent a security leak. If it were any comfort, he told a somewhat shaken Wylie, he was willing to sacrifice his own for the same cause.

Wylie, who had been doing public relations work for the government on the B-29 Bomber, urged that his dossier be checked in Washington. This was done and Wylie was cleared. In response to Wylie's offer to tear up the manuscript of *Paradise Crater*, the Major, mellowed by a few drinks, suggested that it be stored in the trunk until after the war.

Four months later, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and BLUE BOOK asked for the story back, publishing it in its October, 1945, number.

But the efforts of the military to restrict all material related to atomic research, particularly the May-Johnson Bill, imbued Wylie with a missionary's zeal. He wrote a short story, *Blunder*, telling how the world blew itself apart by an atomic accident out of ignorance of simple experimental data. This effective tale, which appeared in COLLIERS for January 12, 1946, is believed to have influenced opinion in favor of the McMahon Bill, which permitted a more liberal approach to the exchange of atomic data.

The crusading Wylie swung back to philosophy in *An Essay on Morals* published in 1947, which, in essence, asks people to renounce the religious vanity that holds that we are animals shaped in the image of God and thereby sets us in conflict with our own instincts and instead, to attempt to shape ourselves into Godlike animals by learning to understand our instincts and thereby our motives.

*Opus 21* in 1949 was a more sophisticated elaboration cast in fictional form of the material in *Generation of Vipers*, and proved an exceptional, if lesser, success. Of interest was the short fantasy inserted in the volume concerning obscenities formed by clouds over some of the world's major cities and the collapse of organized government upon the failure of the best efforts to dissipate them.

Wylie's reputation as a woman hater, earned by *Generation of Vipers*, resulted in the AMERICAN SCHOLAR sending to him for comment three articles by women intimating that the world would be a finer place if it were run by the female of the species, or better yet, if the male could be dispensed with entirely.

In reply, and against the advice of his agent, who regarded



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the idea as uncommercial, Wylie wrote *The Disappearance*, a fantasy which postulated what would happen if all men were to simultaneously disappear from the Earth, and, conversely, if the same were to happen to all women. *The Disappearance* substantiated what many of the readers had sensed behind the vitriolic front of Philip Wylie—as in superbly resourceful prose he showed the interdependence of the sexes and asked them to exercise more understanding and love—that here was a fundamentally kindly and compassionate man who hoped for the best even as he exposed the worst. *The Disappearance* put Wylie's name back up on the best-seller list.

The same year as *The Disappearance*, COLLIER'S asked Philip Wylie to contribute to its October 27 issue which was entirely built around the subject of "Preview of the War We Do Not Want" (a hypothetical nuclear struggle with Russia). In *Philadelphia Phase*, he did as slick and polished a romance of Americans and Russians cooperating to clean up the rubbage of an atom bombed city as has ever been published.

A year later, he was warning the nation that there were other means of delivering the atom bomb besides planes or missiles in *The Smuggled Atom Bomb*, included as one of three stories in *Three to Be Read*, published by Rinehart in 1951. This story dealt with foreign agents who smuggle parts of atom bombs into this country to assemble them here and blow up New York. Literarily, he was unable to rescue the tale from a bit too much corn and melodrama.

*Tomorrow*, a novel of civil defense during an atomic war, was outdated within six months of its publication in 1954, when the development of hydrogen weapons destroyed its validity.

Wylie's credo for the nuclear age was best dramatized in *The Answer*, a fantasy featured in THE SATURDAY EVENING POST for May 7, 1955. Both the United States and Russia find a dead angel in their respective bomb craters after atomic tests. The angels disappear, but a golden book is left behind. Printed in a thousand diverse languages, many not of Earth, is one message: "Love one another."

Lest his admirers feel that he was going soft, Wylie had published in TRUE for May, 1958, an article whose title is self-explanatory: *To Hell With Togetherness*. But at the same time, the message of *The Answer* was still his primary sermon, as evidenced by *Jungle Journey*, an adventure story evidently originally intended for a better market, which appeared in JACK LON-



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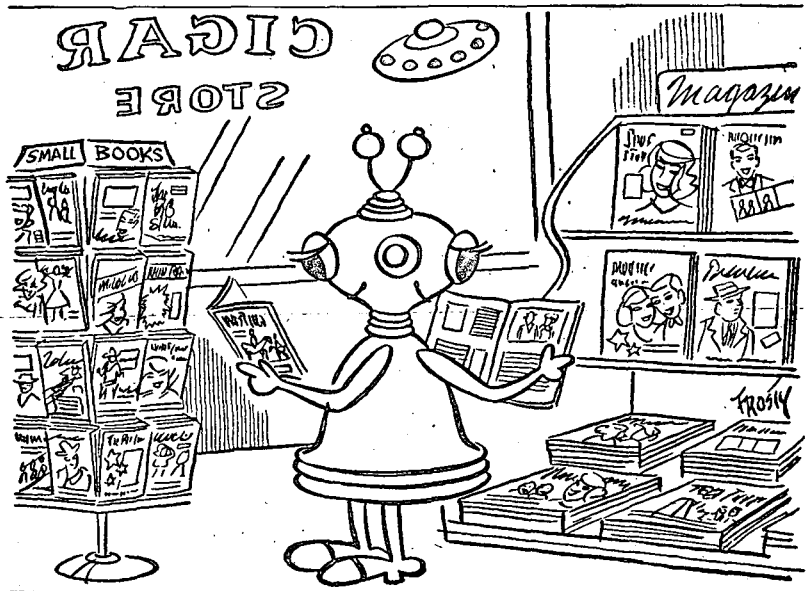
DON'S ADVENTURE MAGAZINE for December, 1958. A first-rate thriller, it tells of the discovery in the jungle of a deserted spaceship, protected by a circle of flesh-eating plants capable of devouring a herd of elephants.

Upon entering the spaceship and deciphering its records, it is found that they have been left by an alien race, thousands of years past, who check on the cultural developments of the planets and destroy races they feel are taking the wrong path: "For ours is the duty to prevent the pestilence of breeds with brains but without love from moving out into the Infinite and loving universe." They will return in one year!

More specifically, Philip Wylie addressed himself to the fraternity of science fiction writers in his essay *Science Fiction and Sanity in an Age of Crisis* appearing in *Modern Science Fiction* published by McCann in 1953. "We science fiction writers —most of us—have taught the people a little knowledge, but such a little and in such a blurred and reckless fashion that it constitutes true and factual information in the minds of very few. More than that, we have taught the people to be afraid—because most of *us* are afraid, and do not realize it. That man is a positive force, evolving and maturing, responsible for his acts and able if he will to deal with their consequences, we have not said." **THE END**



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# Who Is Mrs. Myob?

*Mrs. Myob didn't know the first rule for handling children: If they're quiet, leave them alone!*

By HENRY SLESAR

IT WAS possible that Alice Rutledge actually heard her neighbors speak of Mrs. Myob, without realizing that the reference was to herself. That's the uncanny thing with nicknames. The name itself was a gem from a babe's mouth: a local town child who knew about Mrs. Rutledge's sharp-nosed preoccupation with everyone's affairs, and knew what response she evoked from the more vocal grownups in Somerville. Mind Your Own Business. M.Y.O.B. Mrs. Myob. The name stuck like tossed tar, and wherever the lean, stick-like figure walked, like an ambulant closed umbrella, someone in Somerville was sure to giggle and whisper it.

Mrs. Myob, if unaware of the nickname, was definitely aware of the giggles. But she didn't mind. She had lived in Somerville longer than any resident, barring the dodderers in the Old Folks' Home, and she felt entitled to her prying ways. She looked upon herself as an honorary law enforcement officer, a one-woman vigilante committee, hunting down moral offenders. She could point with pride to some successes. There was Mrs. Ainsbury, whose husband beat her when drunk. It was Mrs. Myob who forced the Somerville constabulary to put him away, leaving Mrs. Ainsbury without her husband, or his income, for six months. Mrs. Ainsbury didn't thank Mrs. Myob for her efforts, but Mrs. Myob felt contentment in a job well done. There was Mr. Huneker, the supermarket's meat counter salesman, who "looked suspicious" to Mrs. Myob. A quiet investigation proved her right: Mr. Huneker



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had once spent three years in prison. Imagine an ex-convict weighing the town folks' meat! Mr. Huneker wasn't working at the supermarket anymore. Titter, giggle, and guffaw, Mrs. Myob remained steadfast, and dedicated to her nose.

One bright Saturday morning, Mrs. Myob took her nose for a walk down Falmouth Avenue, presumably to enjoy the health-giving benefits of the fresh air and early sunshine. Actually, the residential street would be the last choice of health-seekers, since it was the main thoroughfare of the impoverished half of Somerville. Small, unlovely homes with acned paint jobs, littered sidewalks, laden clotheslines, stray dogs, uncovered trash cans, and the unpleasant aromas of cheap food were the features of Falmouth Avenue. But for Mrs. Myob, the decaying ground of poverty was the ideal hunting place for the game she was after.

There was a discouraging quiet over the neighborhood that morning, and it made Mrs. Myob strangely restless. The August sun was already swollen and feverish, despite the early hour, and the heat had made the residents of Falmouth Avenue sluggish and uninteresting. There were no anguished outcries, no drunken oaths, no domestic quarrels, no sound and no stir of activity to warrant her attention. Mrs. Myob frowned, and reached the very Dead End of Falmouth Avenue with nothing to report. Luckily, she had the sense to investigate a split board in a fence that encircled the last home on the street, a delapidated frame house with a pockmarked roof. It was then that she saw the child, and her famous nose flared at the nostrils and tilted at an alarming angle. It was an ordinary, dirty child, about four years old, with ragged blonde hair that was brunetted by soil, wearing a ragged "jumper" that made it impossible to determine its sex. After a moment of peering at its snub-nosed, brutish face, she decided that it was a girl. But it wasn't the child or its gender that inflamed her with the passion to right wrongs—it was the length of brown rope that circled its ankle and extended some twenty feet to the trunk of a maple tree.

"Tied!" Mrs. Myob said aloud. "Tied like an animal!"

The child was sitting on the ground, playing with a frayed tennis ball. She was too far away to have heard her outburst, but the little head went up, and the pupils of the small eyes slid from side to side. Then she rose, tottered towards the fence, seeming to forget that she had reach-



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ed the end of her tether. The inevitable happened; the child tripped, and fell into the mud. She didn't cry.

Mrs. Myob, with a gasp of indignation, looked up at the house that harbored the parental monster responsible, and then strode towards the entrance. The door was approached from a flight of worn, wooden steps, and she could no longer see the offending sight from the front of the house. But she knew it was there, and she was going to let them know it.

She rang the doorbell furiously, until certain that no one was home. She looked about her, and saw a neighbor's house some twenty yards away, with an aproned woman languidly sweeping the front steps.

"Here, you," she said officiously, heading for the woman. "I want to talk to you."

The woman glanced up, too hot to look surprised. She leaned on the broom, grateful for the interruption.

"Do you know these people?" Mrs. Myob said. "The people who live here?"

"You mean Mrs. Estes?"

"I don't know the name."

"I know *of* her," the woman shrugged. "Never spoke to her. Lived next door four years, never spoke a word. Strange kind of person."

"And what about Mr. Estes?"

"I never saw a Mr. Estes."

"Do you know they have a child tied up in the back yard?"

"You mean Linda?"

"I don't know her name. Did you know she was *tied* there?"

"Keeps her from running off," the woman said vaguely, already losing interest.

Mrs. Myob was shocked. "Is that all you can say about it? You mean you think it's all *right* to tie up a small child? Just like an animal?"

"Mrs. Estes don't tell me how to handle *my* kids," the woman said, flatly.

"Does she tie her all the time?"

"I wouldn't know. We're just neighbors, not friends. Mrs. Estes keeps to herself, and so does Linda."

"Does Linda play with your children?"

"My kids are ten and twelve. She's too young to play with 'em."

"Does she play with *any* other children?"

The woman picked up the broom and sent a meaningful cloud of dust in Mrs. Myob's direction. "Lady, I'll tell you the truth. I never even *saw* Linda. I just know she's there. Far as I know, Mrs. Estes could keep her tied night and day. It's strictly her business."

It wasn't just a repulse, it



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was an affront. Mrs. Myob gathered herself up in a tight package of anger, and whirled on her heel. She stalked away from the woman, who was now attacking the porch debris vigorously, and went out into the street. She stood outside the Estes fence for a moment, letting her anger dissipate to the point of cool, clear judgment. Then she decided what she had to do.

She returned to the split board in the fence, and tested its insecurity. It had plenty of that. The board gave way in her hand, and it was simple to detach it from the single rusty nail that held it to the fence. Then she eased her thin body through the opening, and walked into the yard.

The child was on the other side of the tree when she approached it. When Linda saw her, the woman smiled reassuringly, and the child merely waited. Then Mrs. Myob walked over and touched the matted hair gingerly.

"It's all right, Linda," she said.

The child's small eyes flickered, but she said nothing. Then Mrs. Myob reached down and untied the knot that secured the rope to the small ankle. It took some doing, the knot was simple, but tautened by moisture. When the job was done, Linda looked at her newly-freed leg with curiosity.

"There," Mrs. Myob said triumphantly. "Isn't that better now?"

The child smiled, revealing a mouthful of unnaturally sharp teeth. For the first time, the woman saw the unearthly color of her skin, the alien articulation of the limbs. Then Linda flung herself at Mrs. Myob in such a way as to encompass her thin body with her strange arms and legs, and sunk the teeth so deeply into her neck that her vocal cords were immediately paralyzed, preventing any cry for help. They rolled on the ground together, but Mrs. Myob, fortunately, was no longer conscious as the razorlike incisors completed the ugly task of taking her life.

THE END



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*A poet said it: "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper." Was he predicting more than he knew? Is the H-bomb not really the ultimate weapon?*

# . . . And Peace Attend Thee

By
RANDALL GARRETT

IT LOOKS just like my brief case," said Dr. Thornwald. "Just like it. But it isn't, of course." He was a small man in his late thirties, with receding brown hair and, at the moment, a worried look in the brown eyes that were partially concealed by the dark-rimmed glasses he wore.

There were eight other men in the room besides Dr. Thornwald, and their faces all reflected the tension that seemed to hang in the air. Four of them were civilian scientists; two were Army officers connected with the Chemical Warfare Corps. Numbers Seven and Eight were agents of the Central Intelligence Agency. All of them were looking at the brown leather brief case that sat on the table before them.

"Did you open it?" one of the CIA men asked.

Thornwald nodded. "Of course. That's how I knew it wasn't mine. Those papers in there don't belong to me."

The other CIA man picked up a telephone, dialed and spoke in low tones while Thornwald continued: "I just took one look and then came straight to Colonel Greely. I knew they might be evidence, so I didn't touch them."

The first CIA man nodded. "Good. If this is as carefully planned a job as most, though, there won't be any fingerprints. We—"



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The second CIA man hung up the phone and interrupted his colleague by saying, "The FBI is sending over Adams. Three minutes."

"Fine. We'll see what can be done."

A few seconds less than three minutes later, there was a knock on the door, and FBI Agent Lawrence Adams came into the room. He was still under thirty, and he looked more like a young business executive or a graduate student working for his Ph.D. than a Federal Agent. The CIA men introduced him around and then got Thornwald to tell his story again.

The story was simple and straightforward. Dr. Gustave Thornwald had been enroute from Boston to Washington, D. C., to bring photomicrographs of his research notes to the Chemical Warfare laboratories. He had left Boston carrying his own brief case—of that he was positive. He was equally positive that the only place the switch could possibly have taken place was in a restaurant during the stopover in New York. He'd gone into one of the coffee shops at the station for a quick bite and had put the brown case on the floor at his feet.

No, he hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary. No, he hadn't paid any attention to who was sitting on either side of him at the counter. But it was the only time the brief case had been out of his sight, so obviously it followed—

Adams said: "You're positive you didn't get up from your seat on the train at any time? To get a drink, I mean, or go to the can?"

Thornwald shook his head. "Not and leave the brief case behind. I did go to the john once, but I took the brief case with me."

"That could have tipped someone off that you were carrying something valuable," Adams said, frowning. "A man doesn't usually stick that close to a brief case. On the other hand, a lot of men carry their toilet articles in a brief case when they're traveling, so it wouldn't have attracted too much attention."

"What should I have done?" Thornwald asked irritatedly. "Just left it on the seat? Or grit my teeth all the way to New York?"

"Neither," said Adams calmly. "You should have had someone with you. Why didn't you?" But he didn't look at Thornwald when he said it; he looked at Colonel Greely.

"Nobody told me I should," Thornwald said.

"You see, Mr. Adams," Colonel Greely said quickly, "Dr. Thornwald isn't employed by the



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Army. He is doing research at the Boston University School of Medicine. He ran across this—this compound, and sent a sample of it to us through Dr. Kitteredge here." He gestured toward one of the civilians. "We tried it and were interested, so we asked him to come down for a talk with us. We—ah—didn't ask him to bring his formulas and so on."

"You certainly didn't tell me *not* to!" Thornwald snapped angrily. "And there wouldn't be any point in my coming without them."

"He's right, Greely," said the civilian who had been introduced as Dr. Kitteredge. "I certainly assumed he would bring his notes."

The colonel reddened and clamped his lips together. Adams ignored him. The FBI man had no use for people who try to weasel out from under by foisting the blame off on someone else.

"Just what is this compound, Dr. Kitteredge?" Adams asked the heavy-set middle-aged scientist. "I'm asking you instead of Thornwald because you know how much we have to know, Thornwald doesn't."

Kitteredge nodded. "Nothing mysterious about it," His husky voice had the brisk, clipped quality of a man who knows exactly what he wants to say. "It appears, from its reaction on test animals, to be another psychodrug. You know how tranquilizers work? Calm a man down, take his mind off his troubles, that sort of thing. Well, for the past several years, we've been working with compounds that affect the mind. We've got several kinds—one of them will stimulate fear, for instance. A man becomes terrified of his own shadow. A cat will run squalling from a mouse.

"Another one effects the sense of judgment. A man can't make the proper decisions. Give him a bowl of soup, a knife, a fork, and a spoon, and he's just as likely to pick up the fork or knife to eat the soup with as the spoon. His judgment is all haywire."

"I've read about them," Adams said. "Sounds like a lot better way to fight a war than using H-bombs. Thornwald's stuff is one of those?"

"That's right," said Kitteredge. "We haven't finished testing it yet, but it shows some promise."

"What does it do?" Adams asked.

"We haven't tried it on humans yet, but it seems to act as a sort of super-tranquilizer. One of our experiments was to put three mice, three dogs, and three cats into the same cage after they'd been dosed with some of



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the sample Dr. Thornwald gave us. They just sat around and looked at each other. Nothing bothered them at all. They just didn't give a damn anymore."

"It seems as though you'd have seen that more precautions were taken to make sure that Thornwald got here without losing his papers," Adams said flatly.

"In view of what's happened, yes," Kitteredge said agreeably. "But, to be perfectly honest—and I hope Dr. Thornwald will pardon this—we have other compounds which are much more effective."

Adams glanced at Thornwald. The biochemist didn't seem too put out. He said: "I'm not surprised. The only thing my compound has to recommend it is that it's fairly inexpensive to make."

"That's true," Kitteridge said.

Adams looked at the older of the two Central Intelligence men. "Got any ideas?"

"A few. Tell you later."

Adams nodded and looked back at Thornwald. "You said you brought microfilm instead of the originals of your notes. Who made the pics?"

"I did," the scientist told him. "I took a 35mm shot of each page. There were only twelve slides. The process isn't too complicated."

"You developed them yourself?"

"That's right."

"*In a box or what?*"

"Well, neither. I put them between a couple of sheets of paper and put them inside the lining of the brief case. Sort of a secret pocket, you know."

"I see," said Adams. Any spy who knew what he was going after would know enough to rip out the lining. I'm going to take this brief case over to the lab and have them check it. I doubt that it will do much good. Switching identical brief cases and suitcases is an old dodge." He didn't add that it usually only worked with amateurs. There was no point in making Thornwald feel any worse than he already did.

Twenty-four hours later Special Agent Lawrence Adams was in the office of the Director of the FBI.

"Sit down, Larry," the Director said, waving at a chair. "What's the trouble?"

"No real trouble, Chief," Adams said as he lowered himself into the chair. "But this Thornwald case is screwy."

"How so?"

"Well, you know how most of these switcheroos go. The sucker ends up with a brief case like his own, stuffed full of papers that don't mean anything.

"But this brief case was easy to trace. It was full of perfectly



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legitimate looking business papers—letters, orders, things like that. A lot of them had the signature of a Mr. Horace Branwyck on them. We checked for fingerprints, and the papers are covered with them. The files show that most of them were Branwyck's fingerprints. He was on file because he was with the Navy during the war; now he's a sales executive for Pennsylvania Steel. We traced him to New York; he's there on business. I had the boys in the New York office check on him. Seems he's been looking all over for his brief case. He made inquires at the lost and found department at the station and in the coffee shop. Then he put an ad in the New York papers—*Times, Post, Mirror, News, Herald-Tribune* and *Journal-American.* Offered a fifty-dollar reward, no questions asked.

"It might be some sort of elaborate cover-up, of course, but it looks to me as though he honestly lost the thing. In that case, it wasn't a switch, but an honest mistake."

"Did he have Thornwald's brief case?" the Director asked.

Adams shook his head. "No. It looks as though someone lifted Thornwald's property and just walked off with it. He and Branwyck evidently sat down next to each other in the coffee shop. Branwyck is left-handed, so he probably put his brief case on the left side of his stool, while Thornwald, who's right handed, would put his on the right. Now, if Branwyck was sitting to the right of Thornwald, that would put the two brief cases together.

"Suppose, then, that some light-fingered character eased up to the counter, maybe to get a toothpick or something, and then walked out with one of the brief cases. Then Thornwald finished eating first and picked up the remaining brief case. That would account for what happened."

"Yes, it would," the Director agreed. "But that still doesn't rule out an enemy agent."

"No. But it makes better sense that way. I'm having Branwyck double-checked, but his record is all clear. Good Navy record, good business record ever since. I think our culprit is someone else."

"How are you going to find him?" the Director asked.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Now, if this guy was just an ordinary thief, he was disappointed when he stole that brief case. Thornwald had nothing in it but some books and magazines—I mean, except for the films in the lining." He took out a cigarette and rolled its filter tip between thumb and forefinger. "A common thief



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wouldn't rip out the lining. He'd pawn the thing. It was almost new and fairly expensive. He could get a few bucks. On the other hand, he might be waiting for a reward."

He put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it, waiting.

"All right, Larry," said the Director. "Handle it your way. It's beginning to look as though this isn't a spy case after all, but check it through all the way, just in case."

The next day, the New York papers carried a small Lost & Found ad describing the brief case and its contents—except for what was in the lining. It ended up: *Purely sentimental value—$50 reward. Contact Box So-and-so, this paper.*

At the same time, a score of quiet, unobtrusive men began making discreet inquiries at pawnshops in the area.

To make sure that the spy angle wasn't overlooked, the CIA made undercover investigations abroad, while the FBI worked on the known spies within the United States.

Six weeks later, the CIA and the FBI knew no more about the missing brief case than they had the day the ad had been printed.

The bank in Westfield, New Jersey, was robbed on the Friday of the sixth week.

Lawrence Adams sat in his office, going over some routine papers that required his signature. His mind was a long way from the Thornwald case. As time had passed, the probability had become increasingly smaller that the case would ever be solved. At least, not until new evidence came from another quarter. He had shelved the case.

There was a rap on the door, and Agent George Bergman put his head inside the room. "Hey, Larry; got a cigarette? I ran out, and I'm expecting a long distance call."

"Sure," said Adams. He opened a drawer in his desk and took a pack from the carton he kept there. He tossed it to Bergman, who caught it with an expert hand. "Keep the whole pack. I've got a carton."

Bergman came on into the office, one hand fumbling in his trousers pocket. "In that case, you might as well get the change I would have had to feed the machine."

"Forget it," Adams said. "I'd rather have credit, in case I run out sometime."

"Fair enough." Bergman began peeling the cellophane off the package. He glanced up at the wall calendar. "*Carpe diem.*"

"What?"

"*Carpe diem.* Translation: *Friday.* Hell of a day for a bank robbery."

Adams winced. "Go lacerate



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your Latin elsewhere; I don't like carp. You mean that New Jersey job this morning?"

"Yeah. Three-quarters of a million bucks! And now they don't know whether it was robbery or embezzlement."

Adams lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "Embezzlement? I thought two men held the place up."

"That was according to the first reports. Now it looks as if the men who carried off the money didn't even have any guns. They just walked in and took the stuff, and nobody as much as said 'boo' when they did. Half the employees didn't even notice that there was anything going on, and the others didn't seem to care if there was. I talked to the Chief of Police in Westfield, and he says, and I quote: 'The whole bunch of them act as though they were crazy.' He called in a psychiatrist, as a matter of fact. I'm waiting now—" He cut off as a phone rang in the distance. "Speak of the devil. Thanks for the cigarettes, Larry." And he left.

Adams frowned for a moment, then picked up his own phone and punched a number decisively.

Dr. Kitteridge came out of the laboratory and shook Adams' hand. "You wanted to see me? Don't tell me you've finally traced down Dr. Thornwald's brief case."

Adams shook his head. "Not yet, Doctor, but we may have a lead. I wanted to ask you a few more questions about Thornwald's compound."

"Go right ahead."

"Well, in the first place, is it a solid or a liquid or a gas? How is it administered?"

"It's a solid," said Kitteridge. "White, crystalline—looks something like aspirin. It's administered orally, either dissolved in water or added to the food of the test animals."

"How does it react on a human being?"

Kitteridge gave him an odd glance. "We don't know. We haven't tried it. And we probably won't."

"Why not?" Adams looked mildly surprised.

"I wouldn't want to take the responsibility," Dr. Kitteridge said dryly. "Come on into the lab for a moment."

Adams followed him back through the door to the lab. Kitteridge led the FBI man past long worktables filled with chemical apparatus, where a dozen men were working, to another door in the rear of the room. They went through that, down a short corridor to still another door. When the biochemist



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opened it, Adams caught the heavy, zoolike odor of penned animals.

The walls of the room were lined with cages. There were rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, cats, dogs, monkeys, and several kinds of birds in the various enclosures. The place looked more like a pet shop than a scientific laboratory.

Dr. Kitteridge led him to a cage near the door where a large brown rat sat glaring malevolently out at the two men.

"This is Oscar," Kitteridge said. "Oscar the Twenty-third, to be exact. One of a special genetic strain. Watch." He took a wooden dowel a quarter of an inch in diameter and two feet long, and poked it through the heavy steel mesh that covered the cage. Oscar squealed and lashed out at it with hard, yellow teeth.

Kitteridge pulled the stick out. "See? That's the normal reaction for Oscar and his family. Now, over here—" He walked a few feet over to the next cage. "—is one of Oscar's brothers. Before we treated him with K-177, which is our test number for Dr. Thornwald's compound, he was just like Oscar. Now look at him."

Superficially, the rat looked just like Oscar XXIII, but Adams noticed that it didn't have quite the same look in its eyes. Instead of a malevolent glare, there was an expression of patient boredom. And when Dr. Kitteridge prodded it with a stick, it simply moved out of the way.

"He's signed a non-aggression pact with himself," said Kitteridge. "He knows what's going on around him; he just doesn't care. He eats when he's hungry, and that's about the only exercise he gets."

Adams frowned. Kitteridge was repeating almost the same things he'd said six weeks before, but this time he seemed to be building up toward something. And whatever that something was, Adams had a hunch he wasn't going to like it.

"The cats and dogs are the same way," Kitteridge said.

"And yet you haven't tested it on a human being," Adams said speculatively. "Poisonous? Bad side effects? What is it, Dr. Kitteridge?"

"Poisonous?" Kitteridge repeated. "No. Not in the sense that it kills or even makes the patient physically ill. And the side effects are very minor." He gestured toward the cage where the peaceful rat looked out at them through placid eyes. "The only major effects are those which you see there."

The biochemist paused, and Adams eyed him curiously.



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"But the effect is permanent," Kitteridge said.

Adams glanced quickly at the rat and then looked back at the biochemist. "They'll never come out of it?"

"I wouldn't flatly say 'never'," Kitteridge said. "But it will take a long time, if it ever does happen. Nerve tissue in the brain doesn't heal itself. So far as we know, brain damage is permanent. The drug evidently makes a permanent change in the brain—an irreversible change that remains after the drug has been eliminated from the system." He pointed at the rat. "Blood samples show that there is no trace of the drug in his body. On other animals, we've tagged the molecules of the drug with Carbon-14 to make sure that the elimination is complete. In a rat, the last traces of the drug are gone within thirty-six hours. But, after six weeks, the effects remain—and six weeks is a long time in the life of a rat."

"Nasty stuff," said Adams slowly. There was a touch of dryness at the back of his throat.

"Very," Kitteridge agreed. "You can see that we could hardly ask for human volunteers. The stuff is like botulin toxin, it only takes a fraction of a milligram to do the job, and then it's permanent."

"You won't need volunteers, Doctor," Adams said carefully. "I think we have some men for you to work with."

"What?" The biochemist looked as if he wasn't sure he'd heard correctly.

"Unless I'm mistaken," Adams said, "someone used Thornwald's drug to rob a bank in New Jersey. According to the reports, the dozen or so employees are acting just like your test animals here."

"Good Lord," said Kitteridge in a soft voice. For a moment, his heavy face looked deeply troubled. Then he said: "Mr. Adams, can we get those people up here quickly? I'd like to make some blood tests, to make sure it's Thornwald's drug that was administered."

Adams nodded. "We're holding them as material witnesses." He laughed, but there was no humor in it. "Not one of them objected. Not one has even asked for a lawyer."

"Have you any idea *how* the drug was administered?"

Adams shook his head. "Not yet, but we're checking everything. It must have been something the employees ate or drank in common, and that shouldn't be hard to trace. We'll bring you specimens of everything."

"Very good," said Kitteridge. "We'll be ready for them."

Within three days, Lawrence Adams had a folder full of in-



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formation and no real leads whatever. The *modus operandi* of the criminals had been quite simple. At 10:30 every morning, a nearby restaurant sent a hand-truck over to the bank, carrying coffee, hot chocolate, doughnuts, pie, and such other dainties as might go well during a coffee break. The bank management had a long-standing arrangement with the caterers, so there was no suspicion there. But one of the employees of the restaurant —a nondescript man who had given the name of Henry Benjamin—had only worked for three weeks, operating the automatic dishwasher. He had gone out for an errand on the day of the robbery and hadn't been seen since.

The big urn in which the coffee had been brought to the bank had been thoroughly scoured by the time the FBI had traced it to its lair, but the discarded paper coffee cups in the waste-baskets at the bank all showed traces of Thornwald's drug. Ditto the hot chocolate cups.

Two and two made a nice, big, fat four, but Adams needed a hell of a lot bigger number than that to give him any satisfaction. He needed more information, and it looked as though it was going to take digging, drilling, and blasting to get it.

There was one other thing to do. Wait. The simplicity and comparative safety of using Thornwald's drug was too great a temptation for any group of thugs to withstand for long; sooner or later, they'd try again.

Adams had flyers sent out to every bank in the United States, warning them without telling them what the drug actually was or what it did. The notices gave the impression that the drug was some sort of knockout pill, without actually saying so. Lawrence Adams knew perfectly well that, after an initial flurry of Doing Something, the banks would grow lax again, but he also knew there was nothing he could do about it, human nature being what it is.

So, while operatives all over the country—and especially in the New York-New Jersey area —tried to track down every clue, no matter how minute, that might lead to the gang, Lawrence Adams, with the aid of the Treasury Department's narcotics squad, tried to find the source of the drug. Technically speaking the stuff wasn't legally a narcotic, but the man or men who had made it were operating illegally by manufacturing medicine without a license, and that was enough to put the N-men to work.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Adams waited for the gang to make its next move.

Agent George Bergman opened the door to Adams' office, walked



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across the room and slapped a teletype sheet down on Adams' desk.

"There it is, Buddy-Boy," he said crisply. "Just what you've been waiting for." The smile on his face lacked humor; it was that of a hunter who has finally found the pawprints of a killer wolf.

When Lawrence Adams read it, his face took on a similar expression, except his was grim—without the smile.

CODE BULLETIN: SILVER CITY NEW MEX-:SDX33901—FARADAY SPECIAL TO ADAMS

*At 1100 MST emergency call recd El Paso office from D. J. Merriman, Sheriff, Grant County, in ref mass robbery SilCit. Entire population w/minor excepts drugged: Thornwald. 84 repeat 84 percent under influence. Town looted. NM StatePol, Albuquerque, notified.*

Adams was on his feet and moving rapidly out from behind his desk.

"Get a special priority through to the Air Force," he told Bergman. The words came out sharply—the voice of an angry man in a hurry. "Get a jet. Two passengers. Twenty minutes. I'm going to talk to the Chief."

Bergman grabbed the phone and was punching buttons as Adams went out the door.

Sheriff Merriman was an average-sized, compact, efficient-looking man, with white hair and a white military mustache. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, a gray business suit, and a .45 Smith & Wesson revolver, which was slung low in a holster at his right thigh. His blue eyes were bright behind the thick-lensed glasses he wore, and Lawrence Adams saw an expression in them that was obviously alien to the peace officer. It wasn't fear; Sheriff Merriman was obviously not so stupid that he had never been afraid. His was the kind of courage that kept him going in spite of fear.

No, not fear. It was terror.

And, in spite of that, the sheriff was still doing what he knew to be his duty. The terror only showed in his eyes, not in his voice or his manner.

He was waiting for the FBI men at the little airfield when the Air Force jet braked itself to a stop and Adams climbed out with Bergman. He opened the door of the county automobile and walked toward the two men with brisk strides.

"My name's Merriman," he said in a low, well-modulated voice. "Sheriff." He extended a tanned, lean-muscled hand. "You're FBI?"

"That's right," Adams said.

The handshakes were brief. The FBI agents produced their



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identification, which Merriman barely glanced at. "You couldn't have been anyone else. Not coming in on an Air Force jet," he said. He gestured toward the car. "Climb in. Only a few minutes to town. Your Agent Faraday is waiting at City Hall. The man in the front seat is my deputy, Collingsworth."

Adams noted with approval that the sheriff didn't ask any questions, although he couldn't possibly know what had happened to the people of Silver City. He and Bergman got into the car, and the sheriff gunned the machine expertly down the road toward the town.

The airfield was apparently the only level stretch of ground for miles around. The road itself led a winding way around a mountain peak that climbed up to one side and dropped down at a sharp angle to the other.

Adams lit a cigarette as he contemplated the back of the sheriff's head. The thin mountain air, at a mile above sea level, felt strangely exhilarating in his lungs, but the lift it gave never quite seemed to reach his mind.

"What exactly happened, Sheriff?" he asked after a moment. "How did you get news of it?"

"I just walked into it," Merriman said, in his level voice. "Silver City is the county seat, but I'd been down to Lordsburg, some fifty miles southwest of here to pick up a Mexican prisoner they were holding for us. Got back about eleven this morning and saw—" He paused for just a fraction of a second. "—I saw everyone acting as if they were sleepwalking."

"Except most of 'em wasn't walking," interrupted Deputy Collingsworth, speaking for the first time. There was an odd hoarseness in his voice. "Craziest thing I ever seen!"

"I got on the phone right away," Merriman continued, his eyes on the winding road ahead. "No dice. Wires had been cut. So I got on the shortwave and called the State Police. Told them to notify the FBI in El Paso.

"We're pretty isolated up here—just a little pocket in the mountains, really. Not more than twenty, thirty thousand people in the whole area. Only three roads leading out—southwest to Lordsburg, southeast to Deming, and north to Mogollon. I told the State Police to block the roads and not to let anyone in or out. Your Mr. Faraday confirmed the order. They're saying that it was a flash flood—we have them up here every once in a while. Road's been blocked for four hours now, and I've got my deputies ringed around the town." He paused again. "Only eight of my deputies still in



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working order, but they're on horseback, and this isn't a very big town. The rest of my boys are—they're sleepwalking—crazy. City police the same way, from Chief Beck on down."

He took a curve at just the right speed and added: "I did the best I knew how. The Governor's sending down a detachment of militia in helicopters."

Lawrence Adams' eyes had narrowed as the sheriff spoke. "That was pretty quick thinking, Sheriff," he said carefully. "How'd you know what had happened? It's not common knowledge."

Merriman's laugh was short and dry. "Hell, son, that's my job. Mr. Gody, at the bank, showed me the flyer sheet you boys sent out on that job in New Jersey, so I just made it my business to phone a friend of mine, who just happens to be the Chief of Police in Westfield, there. Just curious, mind you. Never thought it would happen here. But he told me how those fellows at the bank acted, and I figured this thing looked an awful lot like it.

"I know you boys in Washington don't like to let some things out to local peace officers; I know you *can't*, because some local forces are crooked or stupid or blabbermouths or maybe all three. But a man's got a right to do some thinking for himself, I figure."

Adams' respect for the sheriff went up—'way up. "I'm damned glad you did," he said. "Damned glad."

"Thanks," said Merriman, accepting the compliment matter-of-factly.

Deputy Collingsworth said: "D.J., is there any of that coffee left?"

"Some," said the sheriff. "About a swallow. Go ahead and take it. We can get water up in Mexican Town." Then he directed his words toward the FBI men in the back seat. "Oh. Forgot to tell you. Don't drink any water in town. I may be wrong, but I think that's where that poison or whatever it is was put—in the city water supply."

"How do you figure?" asked George Bergman, beating Adams to the punch.

"Makes sense. All the homes supplied by city water were affected. The others weren't. How else could you poison everyone in a whole town?"

"Makes sense," agreed Adams. "Have some of your men take samples from the city water at various points over town. We'll put them on the jet and have them flown back to Washington for analysis."

"Right," said Merriman. "Here's Silver City."

The town appeared abruptly



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as the car came over a rise in the road, spreading below them, low and flat, like a group of assorted boxes spaced in uneven rows. The car went down into the town, moving along queerly silent streets.

"This is the main business street," the sheriff said after a few moments. "Bullard Street." He didn't need to say anything else.

There were people on the street—the normal street population of a small town. In dress and appearance, they looked like people you might find anywhere in the American Southwest. But their behavior was decidedly abnormal.

Most of them were sitting. On curbstones, on benches, on sidewalks—anywhere and everywhere they could find a place to sit, except in the middle of the street. Some were lying down, comfortable and uncaring. A few were strolling along aimlessly, avoiding the sitters from instinct, with no apparent destination in mind. The expressions on their faces were hard to define; Adams decided that, more than anything else, they gave the appearance of being in a pleased daze, and yet, there was nothing of the zombie about them. A teenager smitten with his first love might have a similar happy-dopey look, but he would probably appear more alert, even so.

"They look so damn *peaceful,*" said Deputy Collingsworth in a hushed, half-frightened voice.

The sheriff swung the car to the right, turned off Bullard, and headed toward an imposing-looking building that blocked the end of the street.

"City Hall and County Courthouse, combined," said the sheriff. "Not bad for a hick town, eh?"

"Not bad at all," agreed Adams. The exchange of banal pleasantries seemed to take some of the edge off the sight of the people who lined the streets.

*I wonder,* thought Adams, *if they have enough sense to come in out of the rain?* He knew they did; the instinct for self-protection and self-preservation hadn't been killed. Their intelligence apparently remained the same. It was just that they didn't *care* anymore—they had lost that indefinable spark that makes a man truly human.

Agent Faraday and four New Mexico State Troopers were waiting for them on the courthouse steps. It had been easy to spot the sheriff's car coming; it was the only moving vehicle in the town.

After quick introductions, Faraday said: "Come on inside, Mr. Adams. We've got the president of the bank in there. He saw a lot of what happened, but



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it's a hell of a job to get the information out of him."

Sheriff Merriman, his voice still low, said: "If you boys don't mind, I'd just as soon be doing something else. Sam Gody is a good friend of mine, and I'd just as soon not see him this way. I'll wait 'til he gets better."

Adams nodded. "Have your boys get those water samples. Pick about ten different spots around town—a pint from each. Get one from the reservoir, too. Put labels on them, telling where you got them. Okay?" He didn't have the heart to tell the sheriff that his friend Sam Gody would never be any better.

"Okay. Ought to be some clean jars in the hardware store. Shall I take them straight out to the airfield?"

"Right. And tell the pilot to take them to the Department of Justice building immediately."

The sheriff nodded and turned away. Then he turned back. "What about the folks on the streets? Shall I do anything about them?"

Adams shook his head. "Wait until the militia gets here; you haven't got enough men to do the job." He turned to Faraday. "What about the houses? There might be gas fires on, water running, hot electrical appliances—things like that."

One of the State Troopers said: "We've already shut off the gas and water at the mains. I've got men making a street-to-street survey now. I'd hate to think what would happen if a fire got started."

Adams didn't want to think about it, either. "Okay, Sheriff; get those water samples. We'll go talk to Mr. Gody."

Mr. Samuel Gody was a lean, balding man in his fifties. The peaceful expression looked out of place on his seamed, hawk-like face. He was sitting quietly on a bench, his head bowed, his eyes gazing dreamily at the floor. Faraday walked over and shook his shoulder gently. "Mr. Gody."

Gody looked up slowly, his expression unchanged. Faraday could have slapped his face and gotten exactly the same response. "Hummm?" he murmured.

"This is Mr. Adams, of the Washington office. He wants to ask you some questions."

"Oh," said Gody. That was all. Just "Oh."

He looked at Adams as though he were looking at a fluffy cloud floating by on a pleasant summer day.

Lawrence Adams stepped forward as Faraday moved aside. He felt the same anger within him that he had felt before, when he had interviewed the bank personnel from Westfield, the anger against anyone who



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could do this to a human being. This time, it was worse. Less than two dozen people had been mentally assassinated in New Jersey; here, there were several thousand and more who had been affected.

At least, he had had practice in dealing with them. Properly handled a man poisoned (That was the only word, Adams thought: *Poisoned.*) with Thornwald's drug would be as easily led as a six-month-old child. He would follow the path of least resistance. It was really too much effort to answer a question, but it was easier than putting up with a lot of badgering. Lie? Lying was much too much effort. Lying required imagination; the truth needed only memory.

On the other hand, it was impossible to get more than a minimum answer from the victim. To expand on his own answers would be, again, too much effort.

"Gody," Adams said sharply, "was your bank looted this morning?" He ignored the surprised looks from the others. Barking at Gody was like kicking a baby, but Adams had learned from experience that harshness made the answers come more quickly, up to a certain point. Besides, Gody didn't really care, except that it was easier to talk than to endure Adams' pressure.

"Oh, yes. Looted."

"Where were you when it happened?"

"At my desk."

"What were you doing?"

"Doing?" Gody's half-smile was soft and bland. "Nothing."

"Nothing? Just sitting?"

"Just sitting."

"Did you see them come in?"

"Them?" He left the question hanging. It wasn't worth the trouble to figure out who the pronoun referred to.

"The looters," Adams snapped. "Did you see the men who robbed your bank when they came in the door?"

"Man," said Gody.

"Man? There was only one man?"

"Only one."

It made sense. Why send in a squad to do a job a single man could do? "What did he do?"

Gody gestured faintly with one hand. "Took the money."

"How much?"

"I don't know. I didn't see."

Adams decided to try a different tack. "What time was it when he came in?"

"Time?" the faintest of frowns flickered over Gody's seamed face, as though he were trying to force a memory that wouldn't come. "I don't know."

"Could you see the clock from where you were sitting?"



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"Mmm. No."

"We got that from one of the tellers," Faraday interrupted. "They hit about nine twenty-five this morning. They—"

Adams turned and glared at him. "I want to know what Mr. Gody knows—not what you or some teller knows. Let me do this, Faraday."

"Sorry," Faraday mumbled.

Adams went back to his questioning.

During the next three hours, Adams questioned all the tellers and other personnel of the bank, and many of the people in the large business houses that had been robbed. When he was through, he sat down with Faraday and Bergman, who had been unobtrusively taking the shorthand notes during the interrogation.

"Well, that gives us a pretty clear picture," he said. "There were between fifteen and twenty in the gang—my guess is eighteen, since there were three cars involved, allowing six to a car. They went to work between nine and nine-fifteen, and left town between nine forty-five and ten. I'm inclined to think they took almost the full hour, considering all they managed to get away with.

"By the way—" He looked at Faraday. "—I'm sorry about that chewing out I gave you, but if someone else starts answering questions for one of those victims, he'll just quit altogether. He figures it's too much trouble to worry about it if someone else will do the work for him."

Faraday nodded. "I began to see that. Sorry I stuck my nose in."

"Forget it," said Adams. "Now," he continued, "the gang had a head start of an hour and a half before Sheriff Merriman gave the alarm. By the time we really started looking, they could have been two hundred miles away. We have no descriptions of them that are worth a damn, and we probably never will, because none of these people cared enough to look at them closely.

"The only thing we have that might be a clue is that there is very likely one girl in the gang."

Bergman nodded. "They had a dame at the switchboard of the local telephone company to tell the long-distance operators phoning in that there was trouble with the lines."

"Couldn't it have been a man with a good high tenor voice, doing an imitation?" Faraday asked.

"Not likely," Adams said; "she knew all the little verbal tricks and code words that—"

The door opened and one of the state troopers stepped inside the room. "Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Adams, but a code message



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came in for you on the teletype. It's marked *Urgent.*" He handed a sheet of paper to the FBI man.

"Thanks," Adams said as he took it. He read it over quickly, his practiced mind decoding as he read, so that it was almost as plain as clear English.

Then he folded the paper carefully and put it into his coat pocket while his mind raced. He turned to Faraday. "It was Thornwald's drug in the water, all right. The samples we sent to Washington show that there was plenty of the stuff in the water to do the job. It doesn't take much anyway.

"You take over here and clean the job up. Bergman and I have to get back. Send in reports every three hours—more often, if the situation warrants it." He stood up. "Can we get Sheriff Merriman to drive us to the airfield?"

In the stratosphere, winging their way back across the continent, Adams silently handed the teletype message to Bergman, who read it and handed it back without saying anything about the contents.

There was a great deal more on it than just the information on the water analysis.

In Harlingen, Texas, two banks had been robbed by using Thornwald's drug. They had insured themselves against interruption by drugging the police department first.

In Scottsbluff, Nebraska, they'd been a little subtler. A Mr. Perry Woodworker, president and owner of a multi-million dollar business chain, was drugged, and for three days he politely signed various papers that netted the bandits nearly a million in cash.

In San Pedro, California, a ship in the harbor had been quietly unloaded the night before. By the time the captain was discovered, sitting complacently in his cabin, the trucks containing the cargo had vanished, probably over the border into Baja California.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, a wholesale jeweler was cleaned out.

In Boston, Massachusetts, a furrier . . .

In Fairmont, Florida . . .

In Gary, Indiana . . .

In New York . . .

Those were only the big ones. In little stores all over the nation, peaceful-eyed men were found sitting quietly behind their empty cash registers. Well-to-do men were found wandering through the streets, their pockets empty. Whole families thoughtfully contemplated the walls of their houses, which had been stripped of valuables.

All these things hadn't happened in one night. They had



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been occurring with increasing frequency over the past four or five days. But not until the news of the disaster at Silver City had finally been released had the various law-enforcement agencies over the country seen that the crimes were connected in a pattern.

The Governors of all fifty states had been notified; police and militia guards were being stationed around every public water reservoir; milk, beer and soft drink operations were to be watched at every stage of the process; the food packing industries were to be supervised in the same way; every means by which the mind-killing drug could be administered was to be blocked.

Lawrence Adams took the teletype sheet from George Bergman's fingers and replaced it in his inside coat pocket. "What do you think?" he asked.

Bergman's face was hard. "It won't work. Even if all the men in all the law enforcement agencies in the United States could be trusted implicitly—which they can't—there still wouldn't be enough men to police every source of food and drink supply."

"It'll work to a certain extent," Adams said. "A cop on the beat can't be everywhere at once, but his very presence cuts down the number of attempts.

"But the thing that bothers me is the timing. These things all hit together—or nearly so."

Bergman nodded, frowning. "It looks as though it's the work of one single gang. And that's impossible. We'd have known about an organization as big as that."

"I agree," said Adams. "What was it Sherlock Holmes said? 'When the impossible is eliminated, whatever is left, no matter how improbable, is the truth.' So let's start eliminating."

By the time the two men arrived in Washington, they had arrived at a tentative line of investigation. The first step was to present their line of reasoning to the Director of the FBI.

But even before they were firmly seated in the Director's office, he gave them more disturbing information. He leaned forward, over his desk, folded his hands in front of him, and said: "There's a fire raging in Silver City. It began a few minutes after you two left. The militia is trying to put it out, but they haven't even succeeded in confining it yet." He didn't elaborate; there was no need to. The spectre of a town containing ten thousand mindless people, guarded by two hundred rational human beings, going up in flames needed no elaboration.

After a moment, the Director



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said: "Now, what was it you had in mind?"

"We've been wondering about the source of the drug," Adams said. "It's been just seven weeks since Thornwald lost the brief case containing the formula for his drug. Granted, it takes only a very small dose to do the job, but, even so, there must have been several hundred pounds in the Silver City reservoir alone; there must be several times that amount in existence.

"I know the stuff is easy to make, as far as a chemist is concerned, but somehow that timetable sticks in my craw. Things have moved too fast."

"Look at what would have had to happen: Thornwald loses his brief case. The person who finds —or steals—the brief case rips open the lining, finds the microfilms, and recognizes them for what they are. In order to do that, he'd have to be a chemist, and how many chemists are there who steal brief cases from people in public places? Or, if he *found* it, why would he rip out the lining?

"Even if he wasn't a chemist, he must have been able to get hold of one quickly. The chemist involved, whoever he is, would have to buy the materials to make the drug, and get hold of the equipment to set up a pilot plant. Then he'd have to turn out thirty-five or forty pounds of the stuff every day. It just doesn't connect up."

The Director's eyes had grown thoughtful. "I take it you'd like to have another little talk with Dr. Thornwald?"

"Yes, sir," said Adams. "George, here, could fly up to get him. At the same time I'd like to have our Boston agents check Thornwald's activities for the past six months or so."

The Director nodded. "Fine. But George may have to take a train from New York on north. Hurricane Jezebel is off the coast up there, and the planes are grounded. Meanwhile, I'll wire orders to the Boston office."

An hour later, more news came in from Silver City. Or, rather, an explanation for the fact that Agent Faraday's report had not been filed on time. The Governor had ordered another helicopter full of National Guardsmen in to Silver City after garbled reports had been heard over the shortwave radio connected with the Governor's mansion.

The militiamen, the State Troopers, the sheriff's men, and Agent Faraday had all succumbed to the drug, in spite of the precautions they had taken to drink only unpolluted water. The flames in the town were raging unchecked.

A special communique from



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the Governor asked whether or not it was possible that Thornwald's drug could be converted into a gas; whether it would be advisable to protect his men with gas masks; whether fumes from the stuff could have the same effect as the drug itself.

After checking with Dr. Kitteridge at the laboratory, Adams wired the Governor to assure him that, as far as anyone knew, there were no fumes from the drug, but that using gasmasks certainly couldn't hurt anything. At the same time, Adams put through a request to the Chemical Warfare Service to send a special investigating squad to Silver City.

Only a very small part of the news could be kept from the news services. The country, in a brief twenty-four hours, had been raised to a pitch of excitement comparable only to the first days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, back in 1941. So far, there was no hysteria, no panic. The news releases had definitely stated that the crimes were not the work of Soviet saboteurs, but of the American underworld. The Mafia, as always, was pictured as the octopoidal monster responsible for every crime committed in the United States —from treason and murder down to shoplifting and smoking in the subways. The news releases weren't playing down what had actually happened, but they were not showing the implications of the pattern of the crimes.

Nor had it yet been released that the effect of Thornwald's drug was permanent. To the public, there was something homey, even humorous, in the idea of using tranquilizers to commit a robbery.

Bit by bit the information began to reach FBI headquarters. The Texas Rangers had managed to nab the Harlingen gang before they reached the border. So far, not one of them had revealed their source of the drug, but the Rangers had hopes that they could get the information within twelve hours.

In New York, an alert bartender had seen a seedy-looking man drop something in another customer's drink and had held the man for the police. He had been carrying Thornwald's drug —a small bottle of half-grain tablets, enough to brainwash half a thousand men. Significantly, he claimed he'd bought them from a man in Boston.

A police undercover agent, working on an entirely different job, happened to overhear a conversation in a bistro on San Francisco's Turk Street, and was still working undercover to trace the source of the drug.

In Seattle, a cache of five



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pounds of the drug was found in a locker in the bus station. So far, the owner hadn't been traced.

As the data began coming in, the pattern became more and more clear to Lawrence Adams. He couldn't be sure of his hypothesis—not yet. There wasn't enough real data to support it, much less was there enough to bring it to court and prove a case. But, given time . . .

By the time four o'clock in the morning had rolled around, Adams found himself unable to keep his eyes open. He debated taking a pep-pill, decided against it, and went to his apartment to sleep.

The phone rang.

Adams had known it would. He had harbored no delusions that he would actually be able to get a good night's sleep, so he had set his subconscious to be ready for the phone when it did ring.

He lifted himself groggily from his bed, reached out a hand, snagged on to the receiver, put it to his ear and said: "Yah?"

"Adams?" It was the Director's voice.

"Yessir," said Adams. Then, more clearly, "This is Adams, sir."

"You'd better get down here fast," the Director said crisply. "All hell has busted loose."

Adams had heard his boss talk that way a few times before. He simply said: "Yes, sir. Immediately." The Director had already hung up before Adams cradled the phone.

He didn't bother to shave. There was an electric razor in his desk, if shaving became necessary. Right now, the urgent thing was to get to the office. He made it in a shade under twelve minutes. The Director was waiting for him.

Adams had never seen his chief look quite so haggard. "It's like a nightmare, Larry; grabbing at something that never seems to be there. George Bergman and Dr. Thornwald just came in on the train. But the police had to bring them here—they've both been drugged."

Adams was past the point of absorbing any more shock. "How'd it happen?" he asked levelly.

"We don't know yet. I have some of the boys questioning both of them now. Maybe we can find out something that way."

Adams started toward the door. "I'll go down and help. Maybe—"

"You will *not!*" the Director snapped. "Bergman is in good hands, Larry; you've got other things to do!"

Adams sat down in a chair and



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ran his fingers through his hair. "I guess you're right. Sorry, Chief. It's just that I can still see those people in Silver City. And to think that George—"

"I know, Larry. But we just haven't got time to think of that now. What happened in New Mexico is nothing compared to what could happen if that stuff ever got loose in New York or here in Washington. We've got to break this up before it goes any further."

Adams nodded. "I know. But what do we do? Declare war?"

The Director raised an eyebrow. "Is that how it looks to you?"

"Certainly!" said Adams decisively. "I don't know exactly how it was done yet, but this whole thing is a cover-up for one of the deadliest—and sneakiest—attacks this country has ever experienced. Pearl Harbor was just a couple of honorable gentlemen playing a little game, in comparison."

"You're right, of course," said the Director. "I've already notified the President." He tapped a sheaf of papers on the desk. "You can read through these condensations later; they'll tell you the sources of information and so on. But I can give you the general picture now.

"Thornwald was in on it, at least partly. We don't know yet how deeply he was involved, but it was deep enough for him to try to cover up by staging that phony brief case switch. He never had such a brief case; he just lifted the first likely one he saw and then claimed a switch had been made. Actually, the Soviet agents had his formula long before that. But, since the other chemists in Thornwald's group knew what he was working on, he had to report it to the Chemical Warfare Service and arrange the 'theft' of the formula. That put him beyond suspicion.

"Meanwhile, the Soviet agents had built a small lab and were turning the stuff out. We've located the lab. It's 'way out on Cape Cod. I've sent a squad of men out there to clean it up—" He glanced at his watch. "—and I hope they can make it before Hurricane Jezebel hits.

"At any rate, the fiendishly clever part of their plans was to sell the drug to the American underworld. The bank robbery in Westfield was just a proof run—to show that it could be done. Probably none of the gangs involved knew how widely the stuff had been distributed, but as soon as they saw how easy a job was when Thornwald's stuff was used, they all went out to make their own fortunes.

"The point is that the news services have all said that the



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drug was being used by criminals—Americans. We don't dare try to blame it on the Soviets unless we have absolutely unimpeachable proof. We were fooled ourselves; the rest of the world is going to think we're using it as an excuse to hit the Russians if we suddenly shift the blame.

"The CIA is doing everything it can. We may have to hit the Soviets back in the same way, but, meanwhile, we—you and I—have to dig up proof that the Soviets were behind this attack. And we have to stop the attack itself.

"That's our job, so let's get moving on it."

As Adams stood up, the Director handed him a notebook. "By the way, this is Bergman's notebook. You're the only one who can read that shorthand of his, so you might go through it to see if he put down anything before he was drugged. And take the report condensations along, too."

Adams took the papers and headed back to his own office.

The telephone rang five minutes later. Adams scooped it up and identified himself.

The Director's voice said: "Just got word from the boys on Cape Cod. Jezebel has hit, so they're staying put, a couple of miles from the house that was being used as a production lab. But we won't have to worry about the lab any more. The Soviets evidently had it mined and knew we were coming. It blew up just after the hurricane hit. Tremendous explosion, knocked out windows for miles around."

Adams acknowledged the information and hung up. He had been reading Bergman's notebook. Bergman had evidently gotten some information out of Thornwald before he'd been drugged, but his shorthand was infernally hard to read, even for Adams, who was used to it. He kept on.

The word that had snagged him translated as *arsl*—and Adams couldn't think of a word that would be spelled or sounded approximately like that. At least, he corrected himself, not one that made sense in the context.

Or did it?

"The drug can be administered by *arsl*," was the way the translation ran. But that last word—

He grabbed the phone and called Dr. Kitteridge at the Chemical Warfare labs. As soon as the biochemist answered, Adams said: "Doctor, what would happen if Thornwald's drug were to get into the lungs?"

"Mmmm. I don't know for sure. But the stuff's extremely soluble in water, so I imagine it would be absorbed into the blood-



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stream, just as if it had been swallowed. *Say!*"

"What is it, Doctor?" Adams asked, trying to restrain his excitement.

"Could that be what happened in Silver City? The drug got into the air, somehow?"

"That's what I was thinking," Adams said. "How about an aerosol?"

"Certainly! It could very likely be administered that way—sprayed out into the air from an aerosol bomb, just like insecticides and such."

"I wasn't thinking of a spray bomb so much," Adams said. "Remember that the Silver City reservoir was full of the stuff. When the fire started, they connected fire hoses to the city water supply and started squirting it all over the fire. What would happen?"

"Why the drug would be scattered in the air! Of course! Look, Mr. Adams, I'll make tests immediately! It won't take but a few minutes to dissolve some of the drug in an atomizer and spray a test animal with it. It won't be a definitive test, but at least it will tell us whether the idea is feasible."

"Fine! But don't take any chances of getting a whiff of it yourself."

"I've worked with poison gases for years, Mr. Adams," Dr. Kitteridge said dryly. "Don't worry about me. I'll let you know within ten minutes."

It was less than ten minutes. Kitteridge reported that the drug was just as effective when inhaled as it was when swallowed—if not more so.

That explained what had happened in Silver City. It also explained how Thornwald and Bergman had been drugged on the train.

Why, all a person would have to do would be to spray the stuff into the air-conditioning system of a building, and—

Then it hit him! The hurricane! The explosion! The blowing up of the lab on Cape Cod had been timed carefully. All of the drug—hundreds of pounds of it, very likely—had been blown into the wet air of the raging hurricane. The stuff would be scattered all over the Eastern Seaboard!

Adams leaped to his feet and ran down the hall to the Director's office. He threw open the door and said: "Chief! We've got to get out a disaster warning quick! Get the President on the phone!"

Rapidly, he outlined what he had learned.

The Director blinked at him. "Oh. Well. That's too bad." And he smiled sweetly and gazed off into nothingness.

Adams stood, frozen. The Di-



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rector of the FBI had been drugged.

Slowly, Adams sagged down into a nearby chair. Now what? Could he do anything by himself? Should he phone the President?

He sniffed the air and wondered vaguely whether the drug had been just sprayed in the Director's office or all through the building. He couldn't smell anything at all.

But then, after all, there wasn't really anything to worry about, was there? Of course not. Everything would turn out all right. It always had. After all the tension and worry of the past twenty-four hours, it was pleasant to feel relaxed and comfortable. He hadn't realized how tired he was.

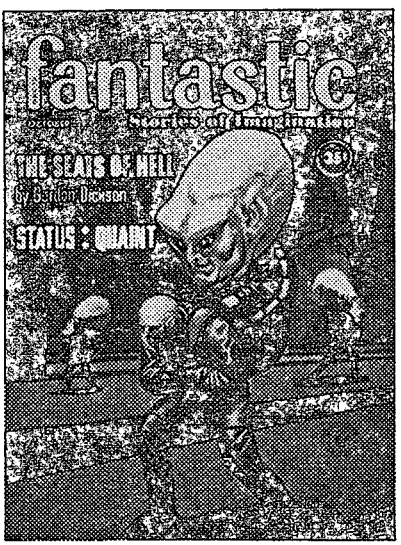
He smiled pleasantly at the Director and then closed his eyes and leaned back in the chair to get some well-deserved sleep.

Outside, a chill wind blew from the north.

**THE END**


COMING NEXT MONTH

**GORDON DICKSON makes a long-awaited reappearance in the realm of science-fantasy with his novelet, *The Seats of Hell*, in the October issue of Fantastic.**




There will also be a serio-comic fantasy, *Status: Quaint*, by the inimitable **Jack Sharkey**; and another thought-provoking short story, *A Bone to Pick*, by **Phyllis Gotlieb**, (whose stimulating *No End of Time* received so many compliments from readers recently).

Other shorts, the usual features, and a striking cover by Summers (left) will complete the lineup.

**The October FANTASTIC (with its new sub-title, "Stories of Imagination") will be on sale at your newsdealer's September 22.**

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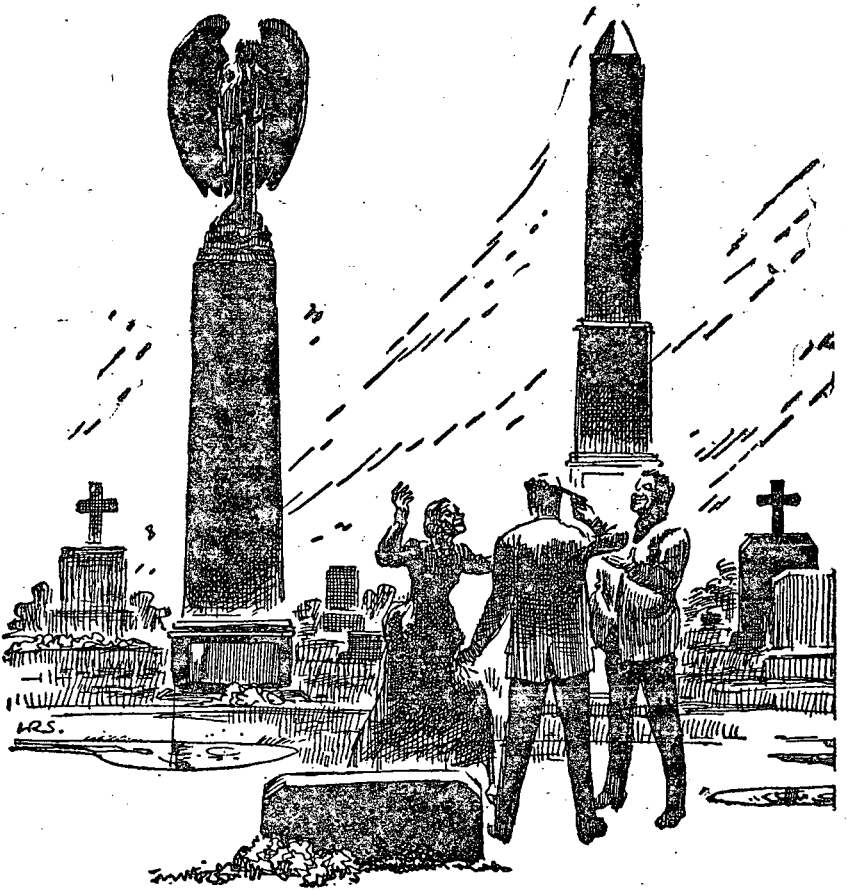

IT WAS raining, a black, pervading rain unrelieved by lightning or thunder, and the mid-afternoon air was wet and chilly against his face as he stood there, his hat in his hands, watching them lower the coffin. The white brass handles were dull with water as they dropped beneath the damp green rim of sod that hid the mounds of black soil that would be thrown upon the coffin after he had gone from the cemetery. For one moment, he stood at the foot of the grave, seeing—with his mind's



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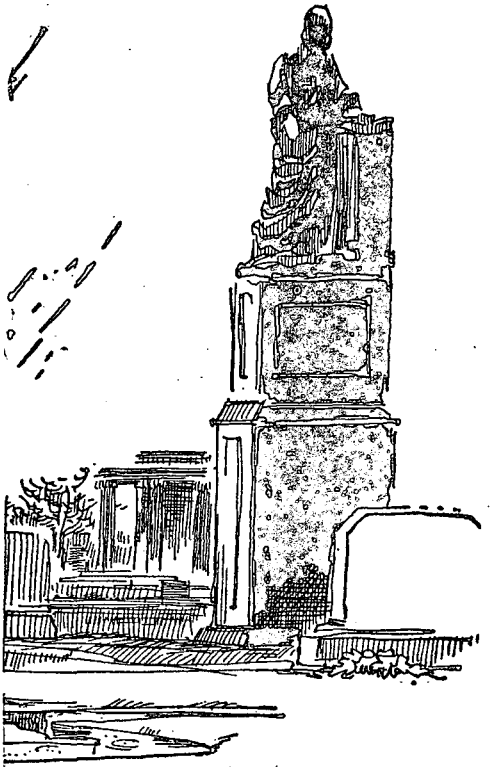

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*The balance of Time is precarious. Between the weight of the Past and the pressure of the Future, mankind is squeezed into an infinitesimal Present. Is it any wonder that now and again someone is untimely crushed by the . . .*

# SQUEEZE

By JACK SHARKEY

eye—into that silk-lined metal shell, seeing for the final time that smooth clear skin, the pale golden hair, and the long black lashes that would never flicker sleepily open again at his early morning kiss.

Then he turned and strode away across the hillside, past the gray, moss-blurred monuments that ran drizzlingly with glistening erratic forks of wetness, and he could hear the first heavy clump of the dirt in the distance behind him as he got into his car. He drove off through the



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swirling rain without looking back.

Later, he climbed the wooden flight of stairs to their—no—to his apartment, passed across the worn carpeting to the front door and let himself in.

The room, full of the same furnishings, the same few pitiful possessions that were his and hers, was somehow empty. He could not look toward the neatly made bed in the corner of the single room. He dared not recall her lying there, fading, weakening, these past few weeks. He dropped his sodden hat and dripping raincoat over the back of a spindly wooden chair, and turned instead toward the mantelpiece. Her face stared back at him from their wedding photo. A young face, bright, alive— His stiff, too-steady fingers turned the picture to the wall. It didn't help. He still saw her face, smiling at him. Heard her lilting voice chatting unconcernedly over the future, over the years ahead of them . . .

It hadn't been even a year. That was all they had had, ten months of happiness. And now—

In the center of the mantelpiece, standing serenely upon the worn gray-blue marble, was a small loving-cup. A tennis trophy, hers. From college, only two years ago.

He remembered the first time he'd seen her, a blur of white flashing limbs, and sparkling golden hair, on the sunlit concrete of the court behind the gym . . .

Her heart! The doctor had said on the medical certificate, "Cause of death: Heart failure." And he had sworn at the doctor, grabbed the smaller man up against him by the lapels of his coat, and cursed him. "It *can't* have been her heart!" he had raged. "A natural athlete like Joyce!? There was nothing *wrong* with *her* heart, you fool!"

And the doctor, shaken, had gnawed at his lips with small white teeth, then spoken, his voice nervous and quavering. "Mr. Bond— Sometimes— Sometimes we have to put that as a cause of a person's death, when we—" His voice had a frightened, guilty quality to it. "When we don't really know what has killed the person. . . ."

Hastily, as the face of the man before him went white with hatred and fury, the doctor had gone on. "When the life leaves the body, the heart fails. What I have stated is not *totally* untrue. It's just— Whereas in some cases, heart failure causes the death of the person, in more cases than is generally known, it is the other way around. No doctor in the world can tell you why a heart *does* beat as long



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as a person's lifetime. It just does. And sometimes, it stops, and the person dies. And then again, sometimes—"

"The person dies," he had said softly, dangerously, not letting go of the doctor, "and the heart stops . . . But *what* killed her? *Why* did she die?"

"I don't know," said the little man, freeing himself with a frenzied twist from that frozen grip. "No one knows." He'd taken up his bag and overcoat, and had gone to the door. Then he had halted, and said to the broken man standing still in the center of the room, "If I were a fatalist, I would say that her time had come."

The doctor and the man had both turned their heads, then, and viewed the silent beautiful face of the girl upon the bed. "*Her* time?" the man had said bitterly. "Can you look at that face and tell me that it was *her* time to die?"

The doctor, his eyes suddenly stinging, had shaken his head. The door closed softly after him . . .

And now it was over. The man was home again, and the bed was empty. He watched the edge of his raincoat drooling a puddle about the legs of the chair.

"No," he said, striding to the bureau and opening the middle drawer. "Not quite over. Not yet."

His fingers had found what he was seeking, and he drew out the cold ugly pistol, and dropped it into his pocket without looking at it. A few moments later, his raincoat shrouding him from the relentless drizzle, he was walking to his car. "The hillside, there beside her," he said softly aloud. "That will have to be the place. It can be the only place for it."

His mind on only one thing, his own culmination atop that rainswept hill, upon the black mound of damp earth that hid her coffin, he started the car without knowing it, and drove off without being aware of it. His body was carrying his mind toward its own destruction. Maybe that was why it happened. Maybe some spark of self-preservation still burned with a frantic flame inside that body, albeit the mind, the controller, was bent on death. Some tiny flicker of desperation took over his body, and blinded his mind to the sharpness of the curve in the road.

The wheels spun, gripped futilely at the slick black surface of the asphalt, and then the car went sideways over the steep brink of the muddy shoulder of the road, and the man—his head dashed violently against the top of the twisting vehicle—was flung unconscious from the



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hurtling metal body, his own body crashing into a tangle of weedy bushes upon the slope as the car continued to fall— And then smashed and burned, far below . . .

Warmth. Warmth, dryness, and bright light. He shifted uncomfortably on the bed, his eyes crinkling tighter shut against the brightness, and he reached out his hand and felt for Joyce . . . Then he remembered, and icy bitterness sent a tremor of agonizing sorrow through him. Then the further memory came, and with it, shocked alertness. The gun, the car— What had happened?

He opened his eyes and sat up, trembling.

The bed was a strange one to him, and the room beyond it. At his left, beside the bed, bright sunlight etched the outlines of a large curtained window. Through the white haze of the lace curtains, he saw green sloping hills, and gnarled trees thick with foliage, and the silver-blue surface of a twisted creek. Blinking his eyes dazedly, he got up from the bed, noting absently the thick patchwork quilt that had covered him, and the pajamas, too small for him, that clothed his limbs.

He ran his hand through his hair, and winced as his fingers pressed inward upon the thick, spongy lump upon his cranium. White sparks danced wildly before his eyes at that exploratory pressure, and he swayed dizzily and clutched at the headboard of the bed for support. The room and floor grew steadier to his vision, and then he crossed the thick woolen carpet to the open door of a tiled bathroom, and looked at his face in the mirror over the sink.

His eyes were red, and underlined with deep black lines. But he was shaven. Someone had done that for him. He hadn't shaved since Joyce had— His eyes shut and stung fiercely when he thought of her. Then he opened them, and looked at his face again, more critically this time.

"I look worse alive than she did dead," said some part of his mind, and he wanted desperately to laugh at what he had thought, but he compressed his heart and did not let the relief of hysteria come and destroy his deep purpose. The gun, where was it? What had happened?

While his careening thoughts tried vainly to secure themselves, he heard the door of the bedroom open, and then a man was standing at the bathroom door, watching him. He turned to the man, indicated the pajamas he wore, and said, "Yours?"

The man, much smaller than he, nodded. "Best we could do,



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Mr. Bond." He smiled. "Mr. Michael Bond."

He looked at the man. "How did you—?"

"Your wallet," said the man, reaching into the pocket of his trousers and handing him the slim packet of leather. "Naturally, we wondered who our guest was. Hope you don't mind. Us going through your pockets, I mean."

He frowned absently, his thoughts moving elsewhere, and mumbled perfunctorily, "No, no. Quite all right—" Then a searing memory flashed across his consciousness. "My pockets—! Did you . . . I mean, was there a—"

The other man smiled. "Ah, yes, the gun. It was there, too . . . Kind of made us wonder, but—Well, we were sure you had a logical explanation for it. That's why we didn't turn you over to the police."

"What police?" he said, scowling.

"They looked for the driver of the car, of course," said the man, smoothly. "We told them we hadn't seen anyone passing by . . . Uh— Was that all *right*, Mr. Bond?"

"All right—? Was that—Yeah, sure. Sure. Thanks. But . . . Who are you?" said Michael, curiously.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," the man laughed, shaking his head. "Stupid of me, Jerry's the name. Jerry York."

He nodded, and shook the man's outstretched hand. "Hello, Jerry . . . But you said 'we' . . ."

"Ah," said Jerry, his face creased into a cheery grin. "Myself and Miss Waverly. She's the other part of my pronominal plurality. She—uh—lives here with me."

"Oh?" Michael could feel his eyebrows rising.

Jerry caught the brief shift of expression, and gave a hoot of merriment. "Wait, wait! Before your mind goes into its purple phase, Mr. Bond, may I inform you that the lady in question is old enough to be—"

"A registered voter," came a cracked-ice voice from behind Jerry. Michael looked over the young man's shoulder and saw a fluttery little creature, with white, wispy hair, and large protruding eyes. Her neck, showing out of a sort of modified Elizabethan ruff, was scrawny, and brought to Michael's mind an uncomfortable thought of vultures.

"Hello, Mr. Bond," she said politely, if a bit snappishly, after a venomous glare at Jerry. That young man shrugged, winked at Michael, and left the room.

"Would you like some tea?" asked Miss Waverly, in her queer, creaky voice. Something in



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those eyes of hers gave Michael a tingling cold feeling along his spin. The irises were pale blue, and quite tiny in the curved mounds of dead white sclerae, and they raked over him without pause, as if the old girl was measuring him for something.

"I—I thank you," he said, a little surprised at the Old World phrasing of his answer, "but I really must be on my way again . . ."

Abruptly, she gave him a bright smile, and nodded. "Of course," she said. "How nice."

*Nice?* wondered Michael, as Miss Waverly tottered and tapped her way out of the bedroom on sharp-fanged four-inch heels. And her shoes, he noted with surprise, were the sort one fastens with a buttonhook, plus being a most revolting shade of bright yellow.

The door closed behind her, and Michael Bond gave a shudder of relief. Why he felt relieved at her absence, he couldn't say, but her departure was like the removal of a heavy weight from his heart.

"What an odd couple," was the only coherent thought he could formulate about them. For the second time that day, he looked out the window at those hills and trees and that twisted blue creek. He didn't recognize the spot at all, though the topography was similar to that of the region near the cemetery— Bitter memory came flooding back, threatening to overwhelm him. And then, strangely, it passed, and he had an almost dispassionate recollection of Joyce's funeral, with none of the dragging remorse that had led him out into the stormy night to take his own life.

He found his clothes neatly folded upon a chair, but not cleaned of the mud they'd picked up in his fall. They were, however, dry, if a little stiff, and he got into them quickly, glad to be rid of the ill-fitting pajamas of Jerry York. He stepped a moment into the bathroom, combed his hair into some semblance of order, and then stepped out the bedroom door.

His initial feeling was one of shock. The room he was in was about the same size as the one he'd left. It was mainly a kitchen, almost a colonial sort, with a big copper kettle steaming on a hob, and an immense fireplace of rough-hewn stone. The round table there, and its barely matching chairs, were of wood, the peg-in-hole variety, unpainted, unsanded, and incredibly worn. And Michael's feeling of shock, as he looked at Jerry and Miss Waverly sipping tea at the table, was due to the fact that he had just realized that this, the kitchen, was the only



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other room in the small cottage. That meant that the bedroom, with its single bed, was where they slept. The two of them. There wasn't even a cot in the kitchen that could ease Michael's mind of this disturbing conviction.

Not that he was ingenuous enough to think that now and then unmarried folks did *not* set up light housekeeping together, but— With Miss Waverly? Looking at the two of them, Michael could see at *least* sixty years' difference in their ages. His heart felt cold and afraid in his breast.

"H-Hello," he blurted, over the strange knot in his throat. His voice sounded unnaturally loud, almost a shout, yet they turned slowly, and with expressions on their faces as though they had heard but a normal tone in his salutation.

"I'll pour your tea," said Miss Waverly, bracing her aged form with one hand on the chair back, as she got slowly to her feet. Her eyes were giving Michael that hungry-once-over again, and his skin felt clammy beneath that bold, indecent stare.

"I don't think I really want—" he began, but Jerry had turned back to his own tea, and Miss Waverly was busy with tea leaves, a porcelain mug, and a tin dipper beside that bubbling copper kettle. Apprehensively, he knew not why, Michael sat himself down at the opposite side of the round table from their closely placed chairs, and nodded his polite thanks for the cup of steaming brown liquid that Miss Waverly set before him shortly.

He took a tentative sip, found the brew heady but scalding, and set it back in its saucer to cool.

"You don't like it!" accused Miss Waverly, abruptly.

She faced him angrily across the tabletop, and Michael felt for a hideous moment that she would spring at him. Then Jerry York's hand fell upon her withered forearm.

"Please, Caroline," he said bluntly. "He's a guest."

Her mouth worked over apparently toothless gums, but she turned away from Michael without speaking again. Jerry turned an apologetic smile toward Michael, as if to say, "Excuse her old-aged irritability." But the smile was not a convincing one. It was false, and Michael saw through it to something incomprehensibly terrifying. The smile was, he felt suddenly, as false as Jerry's amiability.

Michael Bond wanted very much, all at once, to be away from there, away from this odd cottage, with its modern plumbing in one room, and ancient kitchen in the other. His flesh



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crawled like a coating of lice, and he was teetering on the rim of terror, blind terror.

"I—" Michael got clumsily to his feet. "I think I'll be leaving you, now. I can't thank you enough—"

"His gun!" hissed Miss Caroline Waverly at her young, happy-visaged companion. "Don't let him forget his gun!"

*"Caroline!"*

Jerry's voice was a roar of fury, before which the bony old woman cringed and shut her eyes. Yet Michael felt no pity for her, only increasing fright for himself. And yet, as the young man, with his smiling, ruddy-cheeked round face, handed him the weapon, butt-first, Michael's absurd terror seemed just that, absurd. There was a drowsy, almost hypnotic quality to Jerry York's eyes when he was looking directly into one's own, Michael realized. Icy cold, he took the gun, and turned away from those eyes. His gaze, seeking something, anything, to rest upon, chanced to pause at a picture on the wall. It was, he realized with a start of uneasiness, a wedding-photo, an old one. The couple in the photo were posed stiffly and uncomfortably in the manner of that day, the man with a tall silk hat held in one hand, and his other hand on the back of the chair wherein the somber-faced bride sat. The photo was at least fifty years old. But the face of the groom was Jerry York's . . .

And then the really terrible awareness came home to Michael's heart like a stab of cold iron. There was no mistaking the face of the bride, either. Young, pretty, in her twenties, but with those pale blue, bulging eyes that could only belong to Caroline Waverly.

He turned back to face Jerry York, a question on his lips. But the young man was no longer at the table. He was at the door to the yard. He was just shooting the bolt.

"Yes, Mr. Michael Bond," he said, his eyes hard and glinting in his young—yet not young—face. "I suppose we *do* owe you some sort of explanation."

Led by an unvoiced command from those strange eyes, Michael moved slowly back to his chair and sat down. Miss Waverly, a narrow-eyed squint of amusement on her face, folded veined, arthritic hands before her on the table.

"Drink your tea, dearie," she cackled.

"I don't want any tea," said Michael, not looking at her, his face turned always toward Jerry York as that young man came back across the room and sat at the table. "What *is* going on here?" said Michael, his voice



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hoarse and shaky. "You —You *are* the husband of this woman?"

Jerry nodded. "Yes. Caroline is my wife. Has been for nearly four centuries, Mr. Bond."

"Four cen—?!" Michael gasped. "But the photograph—?"

"Our last wedding," Jerry smiled, patting the wrinkled pentacle of veined flesh that was Caroline's hand. "We do it over again, now and again, for old times' sake, and for the sake of appearances. That was our ninth marriage."

"This is crazy," said Michael's mouth, while his mind found it had to accept those odd words simply because they came from Jerry York, the young-old man with the funny eyes.

"You are the victim of stereotyped thinking," said Jerry, coldly. "You think, 'If he is that old, he should be dead', don't you! Tell me, Mr. Bond, just *why* should a man of that age be dead?"

"Because he's—" Michael began, then faltered to a halt. He'd been going to say, "—too old to live," but that was no answer, he realized all at once.

"Exactly," said Jerry, as if reading his unvoiced thought. "Why *should* age cause death?" He smiled tautly. "For that matter, why should *anything* cause death?"

Again, Michael had no answer. "Because it *does*," was a parrot-response, he knew, with increasing *malaise*. His mind returned briefly to the face of that doctor, when he had admitted to the large number of "heart" cases that had caused death . . . Looking at Jerry York, Michael just gave his head a slow shake, without removing his gaze from the other man's. "What is this all about?" he said, softly.

"The pressure of Time," said Jerry. "*That* is the sole cause of death, *any* death— No, don't speak, Mr. Bond. Let me explain. Did it ever occur to you that Time is broken up into rather unequal portions?"

"I don't get you," said Michael. "How so?"

"The past, as you may have heard, is everything that *has* happened. The future, conversely, is everything that *will* happen. And what, Mr. Bond, is the present?"

"Why— The things that *are* happening . . ." said Michael.

"How long does it last?" said Jerry York, lifting his empty teacup. "Look! I hold this up, then drop it!"

The cup rattled loudly into the saucer, and Michael jumped, his skin prickling.

"Where is that teacup *now!?*" said Jerry. "Not this one. The one that was being held up, Mr. Bond. I will tell you: In the



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past. Does that strike you as a fair distribution of Time? Doesn't the present moment, in the metaphysical sense, seem to be a skimpy job? Yet, with all the endless ages of past, and uncountable epochs of future, where is mankind? *Crammed*, Mr. Bond. Crammed into the most minute, infinitesimal fraction of existence, the little bit of existence we call *Now!* Shoved ever forward by the immense pressures of ages past, bruised against the ever-present gates of Time-to-be. Is it any wonder that some people give 'way with the strain. I hardly think so."

"Are—" Michael's voice would not come above a tense whisper. "Are you telling me that death is the mere result of some cosmic squeeze-play between past and future?!"

"Your wording is a bit colorful, but, yes, that is the essence of the thing," said Jerry York, smiling only with his lips, his eyes remaining unfathomably flat and cold. "And there is a *balance* to be maintained, Mr. Bond— A birth here means a death there. It is a law older than the universe itself. No sooner does some person, weakened by sickness or accident, give way between the immense pressures of what-was and what-will-be, then the balance is eased for another birth, another life to come into existence—"

"That doesn't bear up under scrutiny," said Michael, almost relieved at finding a flaw in the theory. "Why, we are warned constantly of the increasing population of this world—"

"Really?" yawned Jerry York. "Mr. Bond . . . When the Earth's population was scattered over the globe into tiny primitive tribes, the only way to kill a man was with one's bare hands. With the increase in population, there came a new 'scientific discovery', the bow. Men could be killed at a distance. By the time there were cities, mankind had come up with a thing called gunpowder, and an instrument known as the cannon. And now that the world is clogged with nation upon nation, we have atomic weapons that can level an entire city in an instant . . . Ah, no, Mr. Bond. The balance *will* be maintained. Has it never struck you odd that you have *two* breeds of scientist? One coalition urges us to save ourselves from being blasted out of existence by building shelters and making peace with our enemies. The other warns us of the dangers of continuing to grow and breed and expand. Is it sensible, really, when you stand back and look at it? Which is mankind to fear, Mr. Bond: Decimation or multiplication?



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You can't have it *both* ways, you know . . ."

Michael's head was spinning. What the young man said made strange, eerie sense. And yet the feeling of *wrongness* was with him, and persisted within his brain. Jerry York was telling him plenty— But he was leaving something out. What was it? What *could* it be? Michael moistened almost intolerably dry lips with his tongue, then said, "But you haven't explained yourself, nor Miss Waverly here . . ."

"We," Jerry smiled, "are the lucky ones. We are of a vast group of mankind that had sought long ages for the secret of death, and finally found it. What, we asked ourselves when we had learned of this 'squeeze-play', as you would put it— What could we do to prevent our own deaths? And then, of course, we had the solution."

"Yes?" said Michael, scarcely breathing. And then, his mind pounced upon the answer, and he tore his gaze from Jerry York's face, and looked upon the glittering eyes of Caroline Waverly, still feasting upon him with that agony of insatiable hunger in her expression.

"You are correct, Mr. Bond," said Jerry. "We—uh—*cash in,* as it were, on deaths. We know, you see, that you intended suicide with that gun. And Caroline, my dear wife, is waiting for that brief moment of imbalance in an orderly cosmos— the moment when your life leaves it—to regain her own youth . . . Any wonder she is so anxious you should have your gun returned to you?"

"I see," said Michael, his voice low with horror. "In taking my life, I would be leaving a gap between past and future, one not caused as yet by pressure on that spot I had filled with my life-force. And then Caroline could slip in and assume *my* destined span of years!"

The room seemed to be blurring about him, and his whole consciousness began to be wrapped up in that bulging pair of pale blue eyes in that hideous, toothless old face . . .

"I hope you don't mind?" said Jerry, with polite concern forged upon his lazily grinning face. "I mean, after *all,* Mr. Bond— If *you* don't want to continue with the allotted years of your life, you may as *well* have them put to good use, eh?" He leaned forward and tapped Michael on the arm. "But not *here,* of course. We should hate to get involved with the police and spend our long, virtually eternal, lives in some dank dungeon."

Michael arose from his place, giddily, the weight of the pistol an awesome thing in his sweating palm. "I—" he said, a queer



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numbness pervading him, "I was going to do it beside Joyce's grave . . ."

"Fitting," said Jerry, with a bland smile at Miss Waverly. "Most fitting. A neat poetic touch." His tone of approval might have been voiced over a brilliant nuance in some newly written play.

Michael put a hand to his forehead, trying to steady his mind against the dream-like aura that enfolded him each time Jerry York's well-modulated voice spoke. "Shall— Shall I go there, now?"

"Ah—!" said Caroline, overcome. Her ancient eyes were coruscating with incredible desire. She turned a frantic look of appeal toward Jerry.

"But certainly, my dear," he said. He turned to Michael, very much like the host at a polite little party. "We will take you there, of course. It will be our pleasure."

The rain had long since soaked into the earth, and the black mound of soil on the fresh grave was dusty in the heat of the afternoon sun. The two men and the old woman stood there, looking down on that rectangle of soil.

"Why do you hesitate?" said Jerry, his eyes darting from the pistol—loosely clutched in Michael's hand—to the man's face, deeply lined and wet with cold perspiration.

Michael did not know. He was afraid, yes, as any man fears the awful consequences of self-destruction— But there was something else . . . The *wrongness* was still in his mind. "I don't know," he said stupidly. "There's something—"

*"Do it!"* Caroline spat from her toothless mouth. "Do it now!"

Dully, Michael pressed the muzzle of the cold pistol to his right temple, staring at the hard, dusty surface of his wife's grave. He felt the slow tightening of his index finger upon the concavity of the metal trigger that would send a spinning piece of hot metal into his brain . . .

He felt the trigger begin to move back, back toward the point where the hammer would smash forward to ignite the powder in the waiting brass casing—

"Hurry!" crooned old Caroline Waverly, a bit of spittle dangling from her flabby, withered lips. "Joyce is there waiting for you. The wife you loved, taken so untimely from you—hurry!"

Michael's moving finger stiffened, then came from off the trigger. Like an automaton, he turned to face that incredible duo before him, young man and ancient crone . . .



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"Untimely—" he said, his mind snatching at the word.

He looked at the couple, the old wife— *And the young husband— "Untimely!"* said Michael Bond, looking into those eyes of Jerry York, no longer mesmerized by their stare.

The eyes of Jerry York contained only one thing, now. The pallid sheen of naked fear.

*"You!"*

Michael Bond's forefinger speared bluntly against the other man's breast. "It was *you! That's* why she died! So that you, you unnatural horror, could have the span of her years!" The gun had dropped to the sod. Michael Bond's hands, of their own volition, shot to the throat of the other man, and began to tighten. "Give them back!" he cried, his voice rising in blinding red rage. "Give back those years to Joyce, you murdering thief!"

Jerry's hands were clawing vainly at Michael's wrists, and old Caroline Waverly began to scream, a high-pitched sobbing wail that rose like the shriek of a midnight wind on the cemetery air . . .

Through a crimson haze, Michael watched the man's skin go a deep purple, and the distending tongue become veined and swollen with blood.

And then Michael jumped back and let go, with a cry of sick revulsion, as the form of Jerry York shriveled, became slime—became greasy liquid—became sifting gray dust on the earth. There was a deafening sound of thunder, from the cloudless afternoon sky, and Michael staggered, hands pressed to his ears, eyes shut tightly.

And when he looked once more, the fluttering motes of dust were gone, as was the figure of Caroline Waverly.

"Where—?" he said groggily.

Then, from behind him, a voice said, "Michael! Michael, my darling!" A bright, young voice—radiantly alive!

He turned around, and there was Joyce, standing at the foot of her grave, her arms waiting to enfold him.

"The balance—!" he said, stunned. Then she was in his arms, sobbing and holding him tightly. Behind her, the soil of the grave lay undisturbed, and —as at a vast distance—he heard the voice of Caroline Waverly crying out piteously for aid. His mind quivered at the thought of those old, withered hands ripping vainly at the silken lining of his wife's coffin—that vulture-throat sucking vainly for air . . .

And then he took Joyce by the arm and walked away from that place, without a backward look.

THE END



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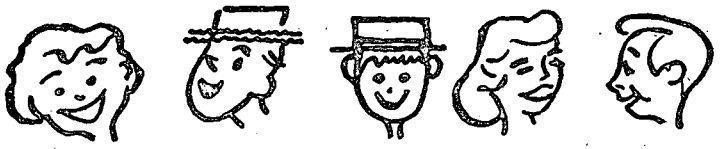

# According to you . . .

Dear Editor:

I see that your readers are confusing plot originality with humor and satire. In his novelet "Doomsday Army", Jack Sharkey obviously was not original or exceptionally clever in his plot—in fact, the plot was a secondary thing. What the story was obviously written for was to satirize anything which came into the author's mind at the time he was writing. It was written as a sort of modernized short from the 30's, sure, but he wrote it as a satire and strictly to be humorous . . . that much is obvious. And when taken in that vein it was more than just a good story, it was exceptional.

The difference between it and the author's shorts is that he did not go looking for a plot. Sharkey writes to be laughed at. As far as that goes, NONE of Sharkey's shorts had original plots—they were just treated a different, "Sharkien" way. The plot of, say, "The Blackbird", was not even particularly good. It was certainly a rehash. Yet the readers enjoyed it. Why is it then that they complain about his novelet. Because he had written it long enough for them to see the plot as it really was. Mistake or no, this gave it life—it was all the more enjoyable.

The Lovecraft story of a few issues back was not very good at all, considering that the author of it wrote such masterpieces as "The Dunwich Horror", "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", and "The Call of Cthulhu". It did, in fact, stink. Perhaps if the other parts of the round-robin were also included it would've been enjoyable. But it does not stand alone! It was also far from "long lost". True, it's last printing was in 1943, in Arkham House's volume of Lovecraftiana "Beyond the Way of Sleep", but this also holds true of the Lovecraft short which I have (will in July, rather) reprinted in my fanzine, *Centaur*. The piece I reprinted should also be billed as "long lost" if we took it in this light . . . and I consider my reprint better reading than yours. Out of all the shorts, why did you have to pick what is most probably his worst piece of adult



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fiction? Agreed, to persons who have not read any or only a little Lovecraft this story would appear good . . . but it wasn't.

Lastly, I would like to say that, though "The Covenant" was not the finest of all sf stories (round-robins seldom are) it was a most enjoyable study in the differences in sf today and the versatility of the authors. It is a great idea and it should be done often.

Jack L. Chalker
511 Liberty Heights Ave.
Baltimore 7, Md.

○ *Would you compare Sharkey with Bloch as a social satirist? Yet Bloch's plots are seldom, as you put it, "rehashes". Point: Do you have to sacrifice plot values for comment values?*

Dear Editor:

There are several things about your magazine I abhor. This is rather a poor way to begin a letter to the editor, I suppose, but your magazine prints some of the crummiest fiction I have seen in a sf magazine and you might as well know it.

The title of your magazines aptly describe the matter therein. However, here I shall occupy myself only with *Fantastic* because this magazine stretches its title to the most miserable ends imaginable.

When a person reads a story, he or she wants to be entertained. A story in the science fiction or fantasy vein entertains by making itself believable and thereby getting the reader to identify himself with the story and enjoy the situations described in it. Many fantastic stories are enjoyable. Very few *Fantastic* stories can make this claim.

Two of your recent stories ("The Funnel of God" and "The Covenant") attempt to stretch the imagination through space and time and fail miserably. After reading the former it was my stupidity, I admit, to waste another 35¢, but your promises! Sheckley, Asimov, Anderson, Leinster. Even after seeing Bloch was going to end it, I decided to take the risk. Anderson's first page should have warned me. "Prophetess"—the first character was nauseatingly stock. But I went on, hoping to find something that might redeem the beginning. Asimov's brief part bravely attempted. Where Anderson spoiled a noteworthy plot by unimaginative color, Asimov used a fine plot and studded it with believable characters and added much to the complete plot with his ending. Sheckley was worth it because of his characters. He manages to bring them in with pur-



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pose and clarity. And it was obvious he was having fun by introducing unknown elements at such a late date and hoping the final writers could connect them plausibly (their failure is a booster to his skill.)

I had a headache after Leinster which is no compliment to his skill.

Bloch was better than expected. But Sheckley and Asimov stole the show.

Your covers, sad to say, are the finest in the field. It promises much. It is sad to find such tripe within.

One year ago I remember *Satellite Science Fiction*'s brag about becoming the leader in the field. Its covers were good too.

Vincent P. Lee, Jr.

● *Guess we better do something about making our covers worse. Contrary to Mr. Lee's opinion our round-robin story, "The Covenant", drew a mass of mail, mostly complimentary. The following are some typical comments on it.*

Dear Editor:

This is my first letter to you mainly because I had never read anything good enough in your magazine to warrant my comments, however, in your July issue you have undoubtedly published one of the greatest round-robin novelets I have ever read. It even surpasses "The Challenge From Beyond" (1935, I believe). This is the highest esteem of praise I can bestow upon you for H. P. Lovecraft is my favorite author and for me to put any work ahead of his is almost unthinkable, yet Anderson-Asimov-Sheckley-Leinster-Bloch's "The Covenant" prompts me to.

Let's have more round-robin novelets and novels from this distinguished quintuplet of writers.

E. J. Brunner
P.O. Box 187
Talcotville, Conn.

● *If we ask those fellows to go through the agonies of coping with one another's plots again, they will all go out of their minds. They need rest after the strain.*

Dear Editor:

"The Covenant" in your July issue didn't turn out as well as I expected it to. Reason: it took on the appearances of a Van Vogt



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story; complication after complication. However, I must compliment particularly the authors Asimov and Bloch for the marvelous unraveling of a very complicated story line. The parts by said authors were the ones which I liked best. It was okay until Sheckley stuck in a few irrelevant things. I suspect that he did this out of pure malice for the authors to follow him. Leinster did hardly anything about it, but Bloch resolved the whole thing into a sensible story again, at least into something which the reader can follow. The story was complicated beyond any reasonable demands the authors might make on a reader. Despite these faults it was still a little enjoyable and I'd nominate it for second place.

First place, of course, goes to Jack Sharkey's novel "The Crispin Affair". The story is done with such a light touch that the reader is almost positive that everything will turn out all right.

The rest of the stories were not up to par for *Fantastic*, but were still pretty good.

How about some more "Round-Robin" novelets in the future, minus so many complications next time!

Scott Neilsen
731 Brookridge Dr.
Webster Groves 19, Mo.

Dear Editor:

I'm stuck up here at camp for my annual two-weeks stint and the July issue of *Fantastic Science Fiction* was more welcome than usual.

The "round-robin" story was read with interest. It is not a good story as a unit but it was nevertheless a great deal of fun to see what the various authors would do with the material. Actually, the "plot" is a pure fantasy, which is not bad if the authors can make you believe it but on this score I think they failed. All through it I detected echoes of the late A. Merritt, particularly in the Asimov and Sheckley sections. Bloch was free of the Merritt style, however, winding up things in crisp, modern prose. Not really good, as I said before, but worth the effort for the novelty.

I have been following the Moskowitz series with something resembling awe, since he wrote about H. P. Lovecraft. Reading his articles I have the feeling of an acolyte of some mystic cult undergoing an indoctrination of revelation. His handling of the subject matter is a marvel of disciplined enthusiasm and his skill at turning a phrase is on a par with his immense scholarship. You don't for a



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moment doubt that what he has told you is but a fraction of what he could tell. My only complaint is that "Karel Capek: The Man Who Invented Robots" is a bit too finely polished at the expense of the rich lore of side information he insinuated into the two previous pieces. It is too sinewy and needs more fat on the bones, but this is not so much a criticism as a selfish desire to suck more marrow from the bone.

Though I am not yet satisfied with the average quality of the fiction in *Fantastic*, the publication is never dull which is a major factor in my regular purchase of it.

Robert Smith
Pine Camp, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

The July *Fantastic* was one of the best yet, as far as I'm concerned. Not only did we finally get that full length novel from Sharkey (or rather the first installment of same) we also got one of the best darned round-robin stories to appear in a prozine for quite a long while. I said "prozine" for a very definite reason, because these round-robin things have been making their appearance in some of the better "fanzines" for some time now. But then, you wouldn't know about fanzines . . .

Summer's cover was good, as were a few of his interior illos for "The Covenant", though he (or is it you, dear editor?) seems to prefer that we fans think Varga is someone else. May I say that Mr. "S" is doing pretty good work of late.

The Moskowitz article about Karel Capek was, as is usual for a Moskowitz article about anyone, very good. The man is truly, as you say, the quasi-official historian of the field.

Bernklau's illo for the Sharkey novel was good, almost as good as some of those Finlay has been doing for the novels in *Amazing*. Glad to see you're finally getting a variety of artists.

B. Joseph Fekete, Jr.
212 Cooley Road
RFD #2
Grafton, Ohio

Dear Editor:

I've just finished with "The Covenant", and it was honestly a great story (something new for a change) with splendid interior illustrations by Varga. You have given us something quite fresh in



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*Fantastic Science Fiction*, and I am sure that others beside myself like the doses of many authors at one time and it is some fun to see how each one in his own individual style works out the confronting problems for himself. I sincerely do hope that you continue to do this—the whole story read like it could perhaps have been written by one person and so Poul Anderson must really get the favorable nod over his contenders for fame this time.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Ala.

Dear Editor:

I am sure you will receive much correspondence regarding the five-author tour-de-force called "The Covenant" in your July, 1960 issue. I would like to add my comments of appreciation.

There remains only one item of curiosity regarding the construction of this novelet by the five authors which Mr. Lobsenz' editorial in the same issue did not cover.

Did the five authors correspond with each other concerning the development of the story or its ultimate direction? And if they did not, it remains to be wondered if each of them had an idea for himself as to where the story should lead.

Though I have not the technical or philosophical background to analyze the story for its merits, I would like you to know that I thoroughly enjoyed its drama and suspense, was able to follow the paradoxical clarity and confusion of the time-space relationships, and admired the simplicity with which the tangled skeins were woven into a comprehensive pattern by all the authors, especially Robert Bloch.

Do this again sometime, with a new crew of authors!

Mrs. Ursula T. Shouldice
2310 South La Brea Avenue
Los Angeles 16, Calif.

© *There was no correspondence among the five authors. Each received the previous installment and a copy of the "theme" cover picture with no further comment. No one planned a complete story. I suspect the little devils of trying to stump each other. Perhaps it would be only fair to get the same group in another round-robin, but rotating the assignments. Like rotating tires, it would prevent undue wear.*



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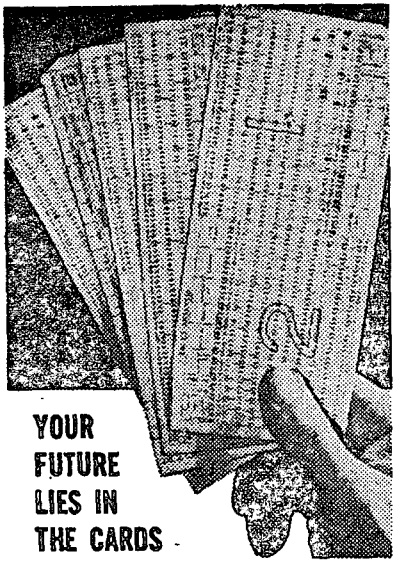

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# EDITORIAL

*(Continued from page 5)*

as to blend in with the remains of the original—parts of Minos' palace so that it would make sense to the average tourist.

The result is that Knossos is studded with new columns and retaining walls and stairways, many of them painted bright red and yellow to indicate they *are* recreations. It is true that this helps one to visualize how the place must have looked. But it's the damnedest, most distracting thing I've seen in a long time. It's pretty hard to imagine yourself back 4,000 years when you turn a corner and bump into a newly-painted red pillar.

The best moment I experienced at Knossos was when, after our guide led the rest of the party out of the Throne Room, I lingered and sat down on the four-foot-high stone seat, its bottom artfully hollowed out to provide comfort for a king's posterior, that is the original Throne of Minos—or at least of the succession of kings known to history under the name of Minos. To know that I was sitting on the same piece of stone where once sat a bearded Cretan who ruled the known world was—and I cannot mince the word—Fantastic.

—NL



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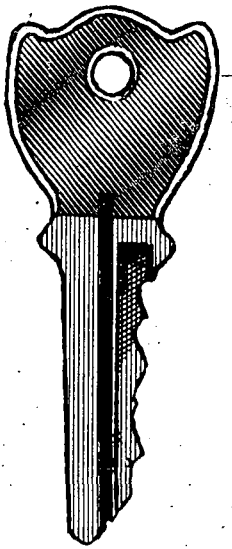

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